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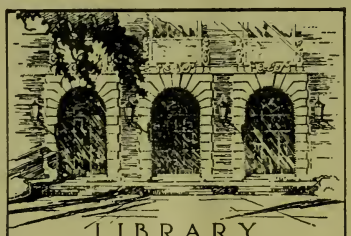

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DOCTOR VICTORIA.

A PICTURE FROM THE PERIOD.

BY
MAJOR-GENERAL G. G. ALEXANDER, C.B.

"Fiction is a fabric woven by Fancy with threads of Truth."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

London:
SAMUEL TINSLEY & CO.,
31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.
1881.
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DOCTOR VICTORIA.

CHAPTER I.

MR. MONTJOY MORTIMORE MAKES AN ASS OF HIMSELF.

Honest Tom Trenton has become radiant. As he stands on the steps of his club, and lights his cigar, he looks out upon the world so benevolently, that the one-armed commissioniare with six medals cannot keep his eyes off him, and only wonders how it was that during the fifteen years he had the honour of serving under the colours, he never had the good fortune to be commanded by such an officer. From his officers he had generally received either hard words, or no words at all; and here stood this gentleman—the major—who,

even when a man carrying a short ladder was within an ace of running against him and putting his eye out, had no severer reproach than "Bless you, my good fellow! bless you!"

But whilst the gallant major stood upon the steps of his club, smiling upon his friends—and who was there not his friend?—and scattering blessings amongst his enemies—if such a man could have enemies—a spectacle for gods and men to rejoice at—a very different scene was being enacted outside the door of a suite of rooms in the "Ring and Rail" Club Chambers, upon which a card had been attached to inform those who might have any curiosity in the matter, that they stood outside the domicile of that now well-known individual, amongst all who felt any interest in the Turf,

MR. MONTJOY MORTIMORE,
Her Majesty's Reserve Forces.

A gentleman stood near it, who, when he turned, after a prolonged rap with his stick in such close proximity to the card that one of the tacks by which it was fastened fell out,

as if in abject terror, revealed himself as Mr. John Marsh. It seemed as if the act of knocking against a door with a stick had something irritating in it, for he was evidently in anything but an amiable mood; and when he renewed his attack upon the door—this time with kicks instead of knocks—the language with which he accompanied it was anything but Parliamentary.

"Come now, no more of this infernal humbug! I know you are there. There is no use your sporting your oak against me—so don't go on making a fool of yourself, but open the door at once, or I'll be— something—if I don't kick it in!"

The threat appeared to produce some effect, or perhaps it may have been that the voice of the speaker had been recognised, for a sound of some one moving was heard from within, and then a voice in languid tones requesting the door might not be kicked again.

"For really," said Mr. Mortimore, as he opened it, "the noise you made was most hexcruciating."

Mr. Marsh's rejoinder was more forcible than polite; but, by the time he had seated

himself in an arm-chair, he was sufficiently mollified to inquire how the world was using Mr. Mortimore, which he did by reducing the question to the simple terms of

"Well, how goes it?"

Mr. Mortimore—whose general appearance had greatly changed since we saw him last, chiefly through his having acquired a dejected limp look, which gave him a remarkable resemblance to a linen shirt-collar before it has been starched and ironed—stopped for a moment in certain preparations which seemed to have brandy and soda for their object, and leaning towards his visitor, as if he were going to impart some tremendous state secret, in a deep, hollow voice, answered:

"Hawful! All but smashed up!"

"And yet you look confoundedly snug and comfortable," said Mr. Marsh, looking round.

"And that's the worst of it," said Mr. Mortimore, letting the cork fly from a soda-water bottle with a loud pop; "that's the worst of it. 'Tis a gentlemanly place"—he looked round with a complacent air—"a deuced gentlemanly place; but how am I to go on living in it without money or credit,

and the first gone, and the second nearly ditto? I can't see it—no, hang me if I can! I would if I could."

"But you gained a pot of money. Why, that scoundrel Trenton told me so. What have you done with it?"

"Just what you've done: put it in his pocket, and in the pockets of his friends; because I was hidiot enough to think because I had made it so easily it would be just as easy to make more—But, good gracious, Marsh! what are you agoing to do? No, no, not here—not here. Since I have had these rooms there have been nothing smoked in them under sixpence. My holfactory horgans are that delicate they will not tolerate anything but the best tobacco."

Saying this, Mr. Mortimore interrupted his friend in the operation of filling an extremely high-flavoured-looking pipe from a sealskin pouch, by drawing his attention to a very elaborately ornamented cigar-case on the table near him.

"Let me recommend you one of these. I keep them for my friends. For my part, I smoke nothing but cigarettes, though they

do tell me that they are damaging to the hintellect."

"Then you may smoke away like a chimney on fire," said Mr. Marsh; "you, are safe, at any rate. But tell me," he added, in a different tone, for he could see that Mr. Mortimore was nettled, as well he might be, for if there were one thing more than another upon which he prided himself it was his "'hintellects,"—"tell me, have you seen Tom Trenton lately?"

"Not lately," said Mr. Mortimore, somewhat fiercely. "Not lately. No, indeed, not since I booked up after the Derby. The major is a rat. Rats don't like falling houses. Then he has become haristocratic. Hawfully haristocratic! He is a regular swell now, and no mistake. Hofficers in her Majesty's reserve forces are not good enough for a man of his kidney; by no means. The major has gone in for lords. For lords, Marsh; nothing else will satisfy his hinsatiable hambition. Lords and marquises! as true as I sit here, Marsh. I passed him in the Park last Sunday a-walking arm in arm with that mealy-potato-faced swell Runnymede; they are hawfully

on together: and when I passed them, confound him for his himpertinence! the major had the haudacity to look at me and touch his hat with just the same smile he puts on when he gives a copper to a crossing-sweeper. I don't know how it may be with you, but he has treated me with hindignity and hinsult, and I will let him know that John—no—Montjoy Mortimore is not to be so treated, and that he is as great an hofficer and a gentleman as he is."

"The major is a confounded knowing dog," said his companion—"a confounded knowing dog; and he has given me some bites lately that have brought the ends of his teeth nearer the bone than the skin, but"—biting the end off a cigar savagely as he spoke—"we will be even with him yet, Mortimore, my boy, take my word for it. I think I have got him—I think we have got him—this time!"

"I tell you what it is, Marsh," said Mr. Mortimore, bending towards him and speaking in a confidential whisper, "I begin to think he is one too many for us."

"You be hanged!" rejoined Mr. Marsh.

"Yes, one too many for us," said Mr. Mortimore. "It may be hexhasperating, but that don't make it the less true. Look back a little, Marsh, when we three first started on the Turf together; as far as money goes, there wasn't a pin to choose between you and him, and my paltry hundred can't be counted as much. But we were to share and share alike—and what has come of it? Nothing. Only this. Look at the major; why, we two hinnocents have been and put all the money that was dropped by that young booby Yorke into his pocket, and lots besides, all of which he keeps as tight as if he had made it himself, and had had no friends to help him. Whilst look at us: why, of all the thousands and tens of thousands that have passed through these hands"—he held them out, palms upwards, as if to give weight to his assertion—"not a stiver has stuck to them. And if you want further hevidence, why, look round this room: of all these pictures and harticles of vertoo, how many do you think have been paid for? Why, not one. I had to sell my last lot, and these are simple replacers, but 'harticles der looks' have be-

come necessary to my hexistence, for without helegance, what is life? Why, it is its hall in hall. A pig may be happy in a palace, but confound me if a king could make it out in a sty!"

"Mortimore, you're a fool!" said Mr. Marsh, after he had smoked in silence for a few minutes.

"No greater fool than you are," retorted the gentleman so addressed; "and I would trouble you, Mr. Marsh, speaking as one gentleman would speak to another, to be a little more guarded in your hexpressions. Fool, indeed! and pray, sir, may I ask in what respect has Mr. John Marsh done better?"

"He has the horses," said Mr. Marsh coolly, as if he did not care to resent his companion's anger. "The horses, Mortimore —and that's something."

"They ruined some one we know of," said Mr. Mortimore.

"They were intended to do so," was the reply; "but I'll be hanged if they ruin me!"

"But is that all?" said Mr. Mortimore, putting on a contemptuous air.

"I would not take fifty thousand for my Bowood book—and both horses are entered for the cup."

"The Crack won't get placed, and Fortuna will be nowhere," said Mr. Mortimore, maliciously.

"The Crack will win!" said Mr. Marsh, decidedly.

"I'll eat my hat if he does!" said Mr. Mortimore.

"Then you'll die of indigestion," said Mr. Marsh, in a marvellously bland manner for one who was usually so brusque and rough. "Come now, I'll tell you what it is—you did me a good turn once, and I'll repay it. Do you want to know of a good thing?"

"Of course I do," said Mr. Mortimore, becoming interested.

"Then I can give you the straight tip."

"What is it?"

"Don't back the favourite."

"But I have been backing him," said Mr. Mortimore, ruefully.

"Then you must hedge."

"But it will play the devil with my book."

"Hang and burn and blister your book!" said Mr. Marsh, losing patience. "It is a question of winning or losing, of life or death, of these snug bachelor's quarters or a garret. I tell you as a friend—don't back the favourite."

"How do you know he won't win?"

"How do I know? Come, swear not to tell."

Mr. Mortimore took up a book—as he might have done when about to take an affidavit in a court of justice—but on perceiving it was only an army list, which opened of itself at "Her Majesty's Reserved Forces," he put it down again, and contented himself with a sepulchral

"I swear!"

Before divulging the momentous secret, which required such a solemn action on the part of Mr. Mortimore, Mr. Marsh rose, and, opening the door leading into the bedroom, convinced himself by a careful scrutiny that no one was concealed there; he then walked back on tip-toe—though why he walked on tip-toe he probably could not for the life of him have explained—to his seat; then,

putting his fingers to his lips, which somehow or other had the effect of making his nose look redder than usual :

"Titmouse is to ride the favourite, and I have squared Titmouse."

That was conclusive. Titmouse had been squared. What could Mr. Mortimore say in the face of such a masterly operation as that? He was fairly vanquished, and fell prostrate at once.

"And are you sure that the Crack will win?"

Not one particle of bounce left in his voice now. He seemed as if you could have knocked him down with a feather, from the moment he had heard that "Titmouse had been squared."

"As sure as I sit here now."

"But"—in a feeble voice—"don't the Crack bolt sometimes? Didn't he bolt at Hepsom?"

"Bolt! Bolt, indeed! I should like to see him. What, with Whipcord on his back?"

"Oh! Whipcord is to ride? Ah! that alters the case." His limpness had become pitiable.

"So far, so good," said Mr. Marsh, lighting

a fresh cigar. "Now, if you don't mind letting me have another S. and B., I'll clear off the cobwebs, and then we'll put our two wise heads together and proceed to business. I think, as I said before, that I see my way to a devilish good thing; and if we can fire an infernal hot broadside into that cunning old snob Trenton, *en passant*, why, so much the better. But, tell me, first—does anyone know that you are hard-up? Is our credit at the club as good as ever? You are not economising, I hope; that would be fatal—anything rather than that. No man can be ruined so long as he is spending money. You must launch out, Mortimore! You must launch out. And if a couple of hundreds will help you to tide over the time till Bowood sets us on our legs again—well, I think I can manage that."

Mr. Mortimore's eyes brightened; nothing takes the limpness out of a man like money. Who ever saw a rich man exhibiting any signs of limpness? And so low had Mr. Mortimore fallen, that even the idea of pocketing a miserable two hundred pounds made him sit up in his chair as if he had

only just discovered that a backbone was part of his anatomy.

"But you have not, I hope, been such a cursed fool as to let anyone know that you are hard-up?" asked again Mr. Marsh. "That is the chief point. If you have, you may as well cut and run at once."

"Of course I have not," said Mr. Mortimore. "If I have not been at the club for my rubber as much as usual, no one knows that want of money is at the bottom of it; they hattribute it to hindisposition, and a-staying in country houses."

"You must pluck up, Mortimore, and launch out. If the Derby has been too much for you—as it has been for me—keep it dark, and Bowood will set us on our legs again. Come, now to business. Let me look at your book. You must set to work at once—and remember that Titmouse has been squared, and the Crack wins."

Mr. Mortimore felt restored to life. When Mr. Marsh had entered the room he was in the depths of despair; now he felt—as in truth he had felt several times before—as if he held fortune in his grasp.

"Marsh," he said, "you're a man of haction, and have been endowed with what I most want—haudacity. I certainly bungled with my Hepsom book, for I had no longer the young un to deal with: and it seemed as if the few thousands he had put in my pocket had been scented out by every hinfernal hawk with two legs, and that they had made up their minds to pluck me to the last feather. But you have given me fresh hope and courage. 'Nile dressperandum' was the motto of our great hadmiral, and Montjoy Mortimore will show that he knows how to act when hadversity threatens him with her devilish frowns. Come on!"—he placed himself in an attitude of defence, as if against some invisible foe. "Come on! The die is cast. Like Cæsar, he has crossed the Hesperus, and is ready to march on to fresh victories. Marsh, he is ready, lead on! Where John Marsh leads, Montjoy Mortimore will follow."

To all of which Mr. Marsh contented himself by taking a longer whiff at his cigar than usual, and simply ejaculating: "Bosh!"

He was less concise when, after an hour

devoted to a careful consideration of Mr. Mortimore's book, and the odds to be offered and taken under every conceivable circumstance connected with the running at Bowood —of which the two leading points were the facts that Titmouse had been squared, and that the Crack must win—he pointed out to Mr. Marsh the absolute necessity of his assuming a cheerful countenance, and above all, of his deceiving that arch-dissembler, honest Tom Trenton.

"Confound the fellow!" said Mr. Marsh, "he is already beginning to hug himself over his own good fortune; and he would snigger over our break-down, as if we had been his enemies instead of his greatest friends. When you have known as much of the world as I do, Mortimore, you will find out that next to the pleasure of success, there is nothing so agreeable to the feelings as being able to kick away the ladder by which you have climbed to it. But only follow my advice, and we will be even with him yet; but don't forget to book him whenever you get a chance—then, however high he may hold his nose now, I have no doubt but that we

shall be able to bring it to the grindstone."

Mr. Mortimore had no time to lose, and he set to work most manfully; wherever bets were being made, he was to be seen, book in hand, and there was a quiet confidence about him which made even honest Tom Trenton doubt whether after all he had been right in his surmises as to the Derby; and he began to have more respect for a man who knew how to keep things dark, and to win largely without being elated.

So thoroughly occupied was Mr. Mortimore in making his book, that he had no time for anything else; and the gentle reproofs of the adjutant of the Pimlico Pioneers were insufficient to bring him to a proper sense of his duty to that distinguished corps.

"Every man cannot be hexpected to become an heffective all at once," said Mr. Mortimore. "It is no doubt very hinteresting for you to hamuse yourself by standing men in rows like skittles. You have nothing else to do, and it is your hoccupation; but, as one of the skittles, it is an employment you must hexcuse me for not happreciating. I'll allow that

the uniform, and all that sort of thing, is very gentlemanly; but when you are told to turn out your toes by word of command, why it's all very well for the hignorant, and for young men of the lower orders, but it don't suit me, nor any other man who has been born with a spirit for command."

"But to command, we must have been taught to obey," mildly suggested the adjutant.

"There I differ from you entirely," retorted the lieutenant. "My hexperience has convinced me to the contrary. I have known those whose whole lives were spent in doing what they were told, and a pretty mess they would have made of command. No, sir, it must be hinherent—hinherent! Though I'll allow it may be cultivated; but your system of teaching everybody to move like an hautomaton at the word of command of some one else, won't do it—you may be convinced of that. But in my case, it is hinherent!"

Mr. Mortimore had subscribed largely to the funds of the Pimlico Pioneers, his liberality and his reputation on the Turf had made him

very popular with his brother officers; when he walked through the streets in uniform, on the occasion of some great review, his appearance was a credit to the corps. So that, although he still continued amongst the "hinefficients," he managed to preserve a certain reputation; and it was even rumoured that, in the event of a vacancy, he would be promoted to a captaincy.

The adjutant, too, had held this bait out to him, in the hope that it would induce him to attend his drills a little more regularly, but Mr. Mortimore did not take it with the readiness he had expected.

"I am not sure I should like the rank," he said; "it is all very well to be a lieutenant, there is nothing serious in it, and you can keep it, as it were, in your coat-pocket; but to walk about ticketed as captain, or major, or colonel—no, my dear sir!—please don't take offence at my frankness—I doubt if I could stand it, for I should always feel like a Christmas hamper with a label on it."

Day by day Mr. Mortimore's book increased in its proportions; it was beginning to represent a very large sum, and if the Crack

won—and who, knowing all he did, could doubt of the Crack's success?—he would once more be the possessor of a fortune; it was therefore becoming a very serious consideration with Mr. Mortimore how that fortune should be spent.

He was constantly thinking of this when he was alone; and not unfrequently, when he did so, interrupted his meditations by thumping himself violently on his chest, or slapping his forehead, and exclaiming at the same time:

"Montjoy Mortimore! Montjoy Mortimore! how could you have been such an hinfernal hass!"

To explain this, it should be known, that only the evening before he had received the visit from his friend Mr. Marsh, he had sat down and poured out, from the depths of his despair, all his woes, in a letter bearing the simple signature "J. M.," to the young lady, once in Lady Arabella's service, but now transferred to Deepdale, of whom in former days the then groom of the chambers had condescended to take some little notice, and from whom he had parted with the disparag-

ing remark that she had not "an haitch in her halphabet."

He had thought very little of her in his prosperity, but when his prospects had become clouded, and he saw little but ruin before him, he began to feel the want of some sympathising bosom into which he could pour out all his misery. He began to realise the fact that, although Montjoy Mortimore might have associates and acquaintances, he could not have friends; and in the state of terrible isolation in which he found himself, what more natural than that his thoughts would turn to the honest and admiring Mary! For there was this in Mary: that whilst John Mortimer, the groom of the chambers, had equally excited admiration in others, they had always thought themselves good enough for him, whilst she never did; and it was this humility in her tenderness which had so deeply touched one who was inclined to characterise anything like an idea of equality amongst those with whom he associated, whether in the housekeeper's-room or servants'-hall, as "harrogance."

No, Mary was not "harrogant;" she knew

how to "happreciate" superior merit when she came in contact with it; she worshipped the very soles of Mr. John Mortimer's shoes. And so it was that in the anguish of his heart Montjoy Mortimore could think of nothing but Mary, and could find no greater consolation than sitting down and writing that letter signed "J. M."

"How could I have been such an hinfernal hass!"

"My dear Mary," it had said, "my dear good girl, you will no doubt be agreeably surprised at receiving a letter from me, for, moving as we do in different spheres, it cannot be expected that we can continue to have much in common; but there are times when even those who have been exalted to high stations look back with a feeling of pleasure on the scenes of their simpler joys, and their companions in them, though lost to sight, may still be to memory dear, as the poet says. But I forget, my dear girl, that you never have read the poets; 'tis a pity, but then pity's akin to love—that's from another poet—and as I write the word, oh!

Mary, I will not say whose image it is springs up before my eyes. How odd it is L O V E has four letters, and so has M A R Y! I never thought of it before. Oh, my dear girl, you do not know what I have gone through since we parted. I have rose greatly, but I hope I am not arrogant, though I know what is due to my position; but after all, I do sometimes think if I could but abdicate from it all and retire to some pretty spot in the country, with a pony-chaise and what not, and a wife—yes, my dear girl, a wife such as I have once or twice dreamed of. Oh! Mary, Mary, I shall never quite forget that day when you thanked me for letting you say you loved me, but that you knew I was too superior. Ah! sometimes how I wish it was not so; but our paths in this world are all cut out and dried for us, as Shakespeare says, and we must bear our honours meekly. But don't think it is all pleasure for us men of fashion. No; indeed, Mary, I have sometimes to work that hard that I have known days, or rather nights, when I have scarce a leg to stand on—and you know, my dear girl, that if J. M. has a strong point it is his legs. No;

we men about town have very hard work of it; we wear our boots out in going from one dissipation to another. Oh, Mary! what with attending of races, and—but what's the odds as long as you're happy?—I have heard it said scores and scores of times before I knew what the odds were; and now I do know, I say they are a device and a snare, and I do hate the very name. And sometimes I think I will leave it all, and when I do settle, go to some place where there are no horses, not even a horse-hair sofa for that dear creature, who I will call Mary, to rest her dear limbs on. And I will drink nothing but brisk table-beer with a head on, and she and me shall share and share alike out of the same pewter; and we will keep a pig and have a garden, and eat our own beans and bacon. I declare it makes my mouth water when I think of it, for I am tired of kick-shaws, and the smell of the dining-room at the club—they call it a Sally Mongy—is that strong, from all the dinners of the years gone by, that I can't abide it.

"But on second thoughts we won't have beans and bacon. No, Mary, we will kill it

young, for I do declare that a nice bit of tender spare-rib with the crackling, Mary—and whatever you do, Mary, don't go and forget the crackling—and sage and onions, with gravy and apple-sauce, is that nice that I have often wondered why those blessed aldermen will go on and on eating of their kallypash and kallypee, when pork is in the market and apples on the tree; excuse the rhime—I know it's vulgar, except when 'tis made by poets for money, for, as the song says, men must live. No, Mary, we will not eat beans and bacon; we will kill it young, for I do dote on spare-rib; and remember, Mary, that the crackling must be crisp, and go off between the teeth like a volley of—but that's shop, for you must know I am an officer, Mary, and you would be proud to see me a-drawing of my sword and deporting of myself ahead of my men in an easy, dignified way, and a-shouting out the words the sergeant whispers in my ear until I am that horse—no, I have not spelt it right, there ought to be an *a* somewhere—but do now so hate the word I will pass on. Oh, Mary, don't you be led away by foolish admiration

for those soldiers—be they regulars or volunteers—they are all alike. I have found out the secret, it's all the uniform; strip them of that, and what is left? Why, nothing. No, Mary, without the uniform no gentleman could stand being obliged to go here and go there whether he likes it or not, perhaps up to the very canon's mouth—Shakespeare again—to please some ignorant fellow who rides about on horse—well, I must put it—back, and bellows at you like a bull. No, Mary; catch me being an officer, if it were not that the girls—not you, Mary; I shouldn't wish to think it was you — liked the uniform. And it sounds well at the club to be able to talk about the service, and say it is going to the devil, as we all do. As if the devil wanted to have anything to say to it. He is not such a fool; but that's profane, so I won't say it. Oh, Mary, what a world of vanity this is! to think that we should pass the flower of our days in attending races, where men do shout at each other most awful, and in a-calculating odds, and in playing at cards, and a-betting on this event and a-betting on that, and the time passing and eternity a-

coming, and debtors—no, creditors—at the door, a-clammering for that which you have not got. Oh, Mary, I do so think, when I feel low and down-hearted, as I do sometimes, of past days, and of one—I won't say who—but this I do know, that she hangs about my heart a sweet burden that I would not part from; no! and her name is M A R Y. Oh, Mary, think of him sometimes, and when the sad time comes and he is no more—for I feel I shan't be able to stand it much longer—let a tear of pity—and shall I still say affection?—fall from those lovely eyes, and water with those pearly drops the lowly grave of one who has gone through many visissytudes of fortune, but had a true heart and a manly fortitude to the last.

"Your ever sincere well-wisher (whilst good, faithful and true—I mean you, my dear girl),

"J. M."

Well might Montjoy Mortimore, Esq., of Her Majesty's Reserve Forces, ask how he could have been such an "hinfernal hass."

CHAPTER II.

THE CUP DAY AT BOWOOD.

Of all dull country towns, Ditchwater is certainly the dullest—indeed, "as dull as Ditchwater" has become a proverb—and that in spite of its being a cathedral town, and possessing the enlivening presence of a bishop and a dean. Its cathedral is its chief beauty, and its tall spire stands up high above all neighbouring buildings, as if it were protesting against, and struggling to get away from, the dulness by which it was surrounded: perhaps, too, smarting somewhat under the treatment it has received at the hands of modern restorers; for when, some years before, it had obstinately refused to continue an existence which had become insupportable to it, and fell, one fine morning, all of a heap,

to the great astonishment of the Ditchwater people and the detriment of the neighbouring landscape—of which it had always formed the central point — it was built up again, shorn of its just proportions, by some one who had evidently said to it, "Fall again, now, if you dare! I should like to see you try it."

Yes, Ditchwater is indeed dull; so dull, that as soon as the American invention by which grass can be heard growing becomes general, it is probable that grass will be sown in the public thoroughfares, in order to get rid of their present depressing stillness.

But, although this is the normal state of Ditchwater, there is one period of the year when Ditchwater asserts itself, when its inhabitants put off their usual lethargy, and when its streets swarm with busy life. Then it is that the White Lion becomes so excited that, as you look up at it, you expect every moment to see it wag its tail; and the Rising Sun shines so fiercely out of its newly-cleaned windows, that the Blue Posts on the opposite side of the way become green with envy. This change always takes place at the same

season of the year, and if a stranger were to ask the cause of this unwonted stir and bustle, he would be told—and there would be a shade of pity for his ignorance in the answer—that it was all through Bowood—the Bowood races.

Now this enlivening fact—that is to say, the races—is due to the circumstance that not far from Ditchwater is the great mansion of a great man, the Duke of Beaurivage, under whose protecting shadow Ditchwater may be said to live and move and have its being, so far as living and moving can be applied in such a case of habitual torpidity. For some of the earlier owners of Bowood had, perhaps in common with most great men of their period, sporting proclivities; and it is to one of them—the third duke, known in the domestic history of those days as the "beau duke," from his having had the reputation of being the handsomest man at court—that the races owe their existence. Some of his successors would have given them up if they could; but Bowood—the races, not the house—had somehow or other so identified itself with every interest con-

nected with the ducal position, that no one had possessed sufficient courage to undertake so revolutionary a procedure. For, Bowood abolished, who could tell what might happen? The idea was too awful—shooting Niagara seemed nothing to it.

Then again, the Bowood races are in themselves, as races, something unique. The distance from London prevents their being assailed—even in these days of cheap special trains—by the unwashed hordes whose great holiday in the year is Epsom; or by the fashionable swelldom which congregates in such large numbers at Ascot.

The situation of the race-course is delightful; the view from it splendid; the five miles drive to it, past the great house—when there is not too much dust, and we all have to eat a peck of that before we die—charming; and the rank and beauty and fashion forming the galaxy which revolve round the central stars of the great house, give it a distinctive character, which is recognised by the fact that many faces are to be seen at Bowood which are not to be seen elsewhere, and that many very straitlaced mammas have been

heard to say: "Oh no! I never let the girls go to races; but you know, my dear, Bowood is quite a different kind of thing. We only go to Bowood."

Indeed, so good is the reputation of Bowood, that it is not unusual to see white cravats and unmistakable clerical hats in the grand stand; as a matter of course not belonging to wearers who pride themselves on being very high or very low, but to good average mortals, sound in wind and limb, with rather a fondness for a horse, and a secret feeling that what is not wrong for their sisters, or for those sweet young creatures to whom they are ever turning their faces as assiduously as the fire-worshippers to the rising sun, cannot be very wrong or very wicked for strong muscular Christians such as they feel themselves to be.

Leaving out the sporting element and the riff-raff common to all race-courses, the frequenters of Bowood may be classified in three great divisions; and to-day being cup-day, and the weather all it ought to be, each of these three divisions has mustered in great force.

In the first division naturally falls the family from the great house, and the distinguished guests to whom the Bowood week is a pleasant distraction from the fatiguing dissipations which are supposed to form the relaxations of society, together with a sprinkling of families and guests from other large country seats.

The second division includes all the smaller gentry, the families of professional men from the neighbouring towns, and of well-to-do farmers and tradesmen of the higher-class.

The third is principally composed of the contingent from the great Naval Arsenal of Docktown, in which, although the naval element is well represented, the military predominates. The sailors, with a firm conviction that the world is a huge kind of ship, and that they are walking its quarter-deck, enjoy themselves greatly in their peculiar fashion. They take a quiet interest in all that is going on around them, and look fixedly at the horses and the preparations for the several races, in much the same grim way as they might have watched the hippopotami at play in the Zambesi, or the sport of

dolphins in the Atlantic. Very few of them seem to have any real taste for racing; and though they may try to put it on, and even reach the point of offering and accepting the odds, in a blundering, doubtful sort of way, they cannot keep it up; and after a time they are sure to be found with their eyes fixed in some direction in which some very pretty girl is certain to be the central point, as if by dint of looking out to windward they had found a squall—a white squall—at last, to which they would have to lower their topsails.

The soldiers from the garrison are in great force. They are generally young men, all shaven and shorn alike, with clothes cut in the same pattern. Many of them, through constant athletic exercises, models of muscular development; but hiding the consciousness of their strength under an air of calm and dignified repose. At other times they might appear listless, but listlessness is quite out of the question now, for had they not been discussing these races for weeks and months, before mess and at mess and after mess, making their bets on this horse and on that horse; or, if not betting themselves, showing others,

in the most disinterested manner, how money could be made by simply following their advice ?

Had they not, too, studied the *Sporting Intelligencer* with as much care, and far more interest, than they had the contents of that admirable work, the "Pocket Soldier," in which the whole art of war is to be acquired for eighteenpence ? There were some exceptions amongst the older officers, whose interests seemed to be somewhat divided between the horses and the ladies ; but this was a disloyalty to the turf which their younger comrades would have been ashamed of, and besides, being principally infantry, with a sprinkling of gunners, who might be known by their walking as if in all the throes of difficulty which is produced by the perpetual dangling of a sabretache between the legs, it was necessary to show Dasher and Slasher, and the other cavalry fellows, that they knew quite as much about horses as they did, indeed more, as they hoped this year to be able to show ; for Sharpe of the 117th Trincomalee Rangers was known to have made a very heavy book—and not only

the dashing 117th, but the whole garrison of Docktown, especially the infantry, were proud of Sharpe and his book.

There was only one drawback to this feeling: Sharpe was the surgeon of the regiment —the brother, probably, of the celebrated professor; and what with his book and his billiards and his whist, for he was good at everything, was supposed to have a very pretty—being a medical man, we will call it —practice of some two thousand a year; sometimes more, sometimes less; but, taking one year with another, that was generally supposed to be the average.

This is the third day—the day of the great event—the Bowood Cup. The racing on the previous days had presented nothing of peculiar interest; everyone's attention seemed concentrated on what was coming. Odds were being freely offered, and as freely taken, on the favourite; so freely taken that some knowing ones began to think that there must be some foundation for the extraordinary confidence which led Mr. Marsh's friends to back his horse—the Crack—with a persistency which seemed bordering on temerity.

Still Exquisite — the favourite — held his own; and some of the old wiseacres of the turf shook their sapient heads when the Crack was mentioned — though it was universally allowed that the race lay between the two, and the owners of the horses, Lord Muddlehead and Mr. Marsh, were for the time the two men whose names were most frequently in people's mouths.

Judging from the assiduity with which Mr. Marsh had been working, his book must have assumed colossal proportions; and Mr. Mortimore, who was full of gratitude to Mr. Marsh, and constantly blessing him in his heart for having informed him that "Titmouse had been squared," endeavoured to make as much as possible out of so valuable a piece of information. Already he had booked the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps and his inseparable shadow Fitzjones; honest Tom Trenton, too, had even ventured a bet upon the favourite; but the crowning point of Mr. Montjoy Mortimore's later operations was a heavy stake upon the Crack, accepted by no less a personage than my Lord Runnymede. This was something to have lived for. He

was elevated to a kind of seventh heaven; but—a few hours more, and—a shudder passed over Mr. Montjoy Mortimore's frame, such a shudder as is said to be produced by some one walking over your grave; but Mr. Montjoy Mortimore shook himself, and as he did so thought only of his good fortune, of "Titmouse having been squared," and of the thousands which, on the settling-day, would be transferred to his pocket.

Happy Montjoy Mortimore!

The day was perfect. Never had finer weather been known at Bowood. The grand stand pulsated with happiness. That portion of it which was set apart for the guests of the great house was so brilliant, that few eyes could look towards it without being dazzled.

"Never had finer weather been known at Bowood," was repeated over and over again; never had there been such a brilliant party at the great house; never had there been so many exalted personages. What is to be done with people who are not happy under such conditions? Nothing. They are simply not fit to live!

And when luncheon was over, and the popping of champagne corks had ceased, and all the world, under the stimulating process of digestion, seemed to have renewed any of the powers of enjoyment they might previously have lost, came the period when a strange flutter and excitement became evident amongst the fairer portion of the assemblage; for, taking advantage of one or two minor races before the great race of the day, the struggle for the Cup, the whole of the party from the great house—with the exception of the gallant veteran von Schwerin, who was as usual suffering from the gout—issued from the grand stand and promenaded on the lawn.

Nowhere else is there to be found such a background of noble trees. From no other racecourse is there such a varied view; but, above all, near no other grand stand is there to be found such an artistic frame for an animated picture as this Bowood "lawn."

And are not animated pictures, after all, the most beautiful? Beautiful, when, as this one is, it is composed of all that is most lovely, most graceful, and most refined, grouped in a harmonious whole produced out

of every diversity of colour, with, underneath, the great throb of life; harmonious, too, despite all the diversity of feeling, the passions, the instincts, the grand aspirations, the petty weaknesses, and the worldly littlenesses which are comprised in it.

The grand stand had discharged the great people from the great house upon the lawn. The smaller people had also descended from their posts of vantage; and some of them—for the first time in their lives—found themselves not only breathing the same air, but treading in the very footsteps, of exalted personages and leaders of fashion, whose names alone had exercised a strange fascinatien over them from the time they had first devoted a portion of the day to the perusal of that column of the daily paper which treats of high life, and of that charmed circle of which exalted personages form the centre.

No, they were not myths; there they all moved before them in the flesh, and oh! in such toilettes!

Of exalted personages it would be impertinent to speak; but is not that magnificent person in yellow, with that sweet

embroidery in dead leaf and moss-greens, the Dowager Duchess of Ambleside? And that tall, handsome girl near her—who can she be? Is not her dress lovely? And there, there!—in a line with her—oh, it is, I know it by her portrait—that is Mrs. Kurr Crawley; and the man—not walking with her, of course—by the side of the fat, made-up woman in the green dress, is her husband, poor Kurr Crawley, who flaunts about in the grand world under the ægis of his wife's beauty, and when the grand world shuts its eyes and pretends to be blinded by its blaze, thinks that it is from himself and not from her that the effulgence comes. Peachblossom, too, is there, with a detachment of the frail sisterhood. Peachblossom, who looks round with scorn upon her rivals, for she knows that she is more beautiful and better dressed than they are, and that she holds many of the men they love entangled in her toils. And that heavy, fat man—who is he? What, Lumpus! amongst the swells? Yes, Lumpus as large as life. Lumpus, who has reduced scandal-mongering to a system, and who sucks slanders from society as greedily as a bee sucks sweets

from flowers. And, for a moment, racing being slack, the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps and Major Fitzjones appear upon the scene; and then, walking side by side—they had been arm in arm—the Marquis of Runnymede and Tom Trenton—Honest Tom, the personification of all that is respectable in a retired officer—upright, brisk, well-brushed, with that bland, pleasant expression which shows the heart of him who wears it to be in the right place. He takes off his hat with a deferential air, as he passes a stout, squat, red-faced man, whose appearance is certainly anything but aristocratic, though he is greeted by everyone he meets in a manner which shows most plainly that he is someone worth knowing. Indeed, were he an exalted personage, he could not receive a greater amount of homage. But if he be not an exalted personage, he is, at least, a power in the State, for Sir Midas Money has an advantage over other potentates, in that his rule is despotic, and that his vast financial operations are so extensive, that they may be said to have had no frontiers. As he walked or rather rolled along, it seemed

as if a golden emanation issued from every pore, and dazzled the spectators with its brilliant rays. Geraldine had once said—in her days of freedom, before the sirocco-like breath of the London season had withered the freshness of her young life—that she never could look at him without thinking of the golden calf.

It was before the gold of which the calf was made that the Israelites prostrated themselves, and most assuredly, but for his wealth, Sir Midas would not have been a centre of fashionable circles; as it was, the man had a calf-like complacency about him which was almost touching.

Sir Midas had got tired of being roared at by the book-makers, and had returned to the lawn. And it would have been wonderful had he not done so, for upon whom did fashionable beauty smile more sweetly than upon portly, calf-like Sir Midas? Other men had to win smiles, he had simply to receive them.

But although Sir Midas was on the lawn, and a few other men whose books were made, or who had no books, or who preferred being

with the ladies, the majority of the men were absent; and the ladies, for once, indifferent to their presence, were devoting themselves, with all the thoroughness which belongs to their sex, to carrying on a fierce war of rivalry against each other; a costly war, as many of their husbands—for it was the married women who fought most fiercely in it—knew but too well.

Beautiful women of high rank paced the lawn with an assumed unconscious air, and a kind of parade step, in toilettes upon which they had concentrated all their powers of thought, and upon which so much time and money had been lavished, that they might be said to represent, in those toilettes alone, as much mind and matter as would go to make up a dozen ordinary lives.

Some of them paced along in dresses so long that they swept the ground with undulating trains of silk or satin, which seemed to writhe under the vulgar contact with the dirt and dust through which they were trailed by their fashionable mistresses. Toilettes out of the great Vautrien's brain, tight where they ought to have been loose, and loose

where they ought to have been tight; so designed as to show that the human form was a miserable mistake and a wretched blunder from beginning to end, and that had Vautrien been its originator, he would have made something very different.

Then the colours! Pink flaunts itself against yellow; green against blue; browns assert themselves in every variety of shade. A dowager duchess, fat, fair, and (at least) forty, disports herself in a light-grey, trimmed with rose-colour, with boots, parasol, and gloves to match, and she is much admired. Mrs. Kurr Crawley, being dark, has arrayed herself in yellow, with dashes of brown and green; there is no other dress like hers in cut or colour, and she is enchanted.

Lady Mounty Bankes, who has invented a marvellous costume of brilliant green and black, is spiteful with respect to Mrs. Kurr Crawley; she cannot see how people can admire her—in that hideous yellow dress she reminds her of a sunflower. Mrs. Crawley, a short time before, had made an exalted personage laugh by saying that, with her peculiar figure, poor Lady Mounty Bankes

looked exactly like a cabbage. All who wore these grand toilettes seemed to have much pity for each other's want of taste; and the only people who thoroughly admired them were those whose means did not allow of their competing in this great exhibition of high millinery art. They felt it a privilege to be allowed to feast their eyes on what they always spoke of as "so charming!" The Miss Crumbles of Crumble Court, just ten miles off across the Downs, declared they had never seen anything half so beautiful in the whole course of their lives, and it is questionable whether either of them went to bed for at least a month after the great Bowood day, without being tortured by visions of green, blue, yellow, or pink toilettes prancing about on that Bowood lawn.

There was one person, however, who affected displeasure — old Lady Wyse, who in her youth had had the reputation of being a blue-stocking, and who was in the habit of driving over to Bowood on the Cup-day, for the purpose, as she said, of studying human nature, and of seeing with her own eyes

something of this progress of which it was the fashion to talk so much. Whether it was that each year, as we grow older, makes us less pleased with the present and more inclined to take a favourable view of the past, Lady Wyse became each year less and less satisfied with what she saw. On this day she was absolutely irate.

"My dear," she said to that patient enduring creature, her niece, Miss Biggs; "my dear, we were great fools in my youth —great fools; but at least we had preserved some little simplicity, if we possessed nothing else. Now, I am positively disgusted; the female mind is so highly educated in folly that I no longer see amiable simpletons, but clever, artificial creatures, whose chief aim seems to me to emulate the dress and bearing of bad women—yes, positively, bad women. If it were not so, how could they strut about and display their figures in these marvellous dresses, in order that they may be looked at? Why, in my young days, when a man stared at a girl she looked down and blushed; now she stares again, and if she wants blushes on her cheeks she has to paint them."

It is possible that Lady Wyse had overheard Mrs. Kurr Crawley ask an exalted personage, when he had politely acknowledged the old lady's loyal curtsey, who the old "quiz" in curls and a dust suit might be.

But the ladies' hour is broken in upon, and for a time their triumph ends. The time is approaching when the great event of the day has to be decided. The grand stand rapidly fills, and in the reserved section Field-Marshal von Schwerin is seen standing on his least gouty leg. The young ladies cease to look at the young gentlemen, and are full of admiration for the jackets of the jockeys, and make little bets on the colours, not on the horses. It seems cruel to them that the jockey who rides the favourite should wear black, and that the charming mauve and white should be only an outsider; but they back mauve and white, or any other colour which strikes their fancy, all the same. Then there is a canter past, and the military contingent from Docktown put on an air of ferocious gravity and desperate resolve, whilst the naval brigade survey the scene through

huge binoculars which might have done good service in the Zulu War.

In the ring the betting waxes fast and furious, and the roar of hoarse voices is so wild-beast-like, that it is difficult not to think that Darwin paid humanity a compliment when he traced its descent from a monkey, for all the monkeys in the world could not have roared like that.

But what can it be which has produced at this moment a degree of excitement in the betting-ring, which rapidly extends to the grand stand, and even stirs the party belonging to the great house into visible emotion? At the last moment it has become known that Titmouse, the jockey of jockeys, who was to have ridden the favourite, has suddenly been taken ill, and that the fortunes of his backers are to be entrusted to Scrubs. Scrubs? who knows anything of Scrubs? There is consternation down the whole line; odds fly about in a wild incoherent way; the strategy of the military contingent is nowhere; the tactics of the naval brigade have become obsolete; an exalted personage is seen in excited conversation with my Lord

Runnymede, and the whole ground is much in the same state as a swarm of bees when they have lost their queen. And all because Titmouse has been taken ill, and Scrubs is to take his place.

It was at this crisis that Montjoy Mortimore, Esq., of H.M.S. Reserve Forces, then at the height of his hopes, came across Mr. John Marsh. Mr. Montjoy Mortimore was more blooming than ever, feeling more confident than ever that the great Titmouse was ill, simply because the great Titmouse had been squared.

"Marsh, old fellow," he said, "I'm ready; the die is cast; it is all right; my book is henormous." Then, struck by the appearance of Mr. Marsh, he added: "But it's all right, I hope?"

Mr. Marsh's answer was a volley of imprecations. Horror of horrors! taking Mr. Mortimore aside, he informed him in a hoarse whisper, that there had been foul play. Some one else had been squaring Titmouse.

"But can Scrubs do it?" asked Mr. Mortimore, pale with apprehension.

"Of course he will, if he can. He has a

name to make—for until he has made a name, it don't matter how he rides—he won't be squared."

"But still, the Crack has a good chance," said Mr. Mortimore.

"Yes," said Mr. Marsh. "Now 'tis a chance; but before 'twas a certainty. I don't care two buttons for the Crack. My backing him has been all moonshine. I have been backing the field through Slopus."

"The devil!" said Mr. Mortimore. "Then what made you lead me on to put all my money on the Crack?"

Mr. Marsh made no reply, for at that moment the bell rang for the start.

To the uninitiated it would have been difficult to have decided which of the ten horses which came up to the post would have the best chance of winning; for though the favourite and the Crack might be faultless, there were others which seemed to possess every qualification likely to ensure success. But those who were thoroughly conversant with the points of a horse, could see that this one was a little too heavy in the shoulder; that one too weak in the hind-quarters; that

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there was a sly, wicked look about the Crack's eye ; and so on. So that there always seemed a reason why each individual horse should lose ; and the only wonder was, how any horse could win.

Three false starts—and expectation is at its highest. At the fourth they go off—as one ; and from that moment they are followed by every eye on the ground, and not a thought but what is concentrated on that varying mass of colour which circles round the great sweep of the course. At first, each spectator imagines that his favourite is winning, and there is a strange confusion in the cries which arise on every side ; then three horses are seen to issue as it were from the tangled mass —their backers become frantic—the howling in the ring is something diabolic—and in it, prominent through his fierce gesticulations, is Mr. Mortimore, hatless and breathless, and foaming with exultation—for of those three horses the Crack gallops first !—" The Crack —the Crack !" he shouts ; and as he shouts, he makes a jerking movement forward, as if it were he who was riding the Crack, and not Whipcord. " The Crack ! — the Crack !—

fifty to one on the Crack! Seventy to one on the Crack! — a hundred to one on the Crack!"

Nothing is heard but "Crack! — Crack!" When suddenly, above it all, in that sharp, penetrating tone which belongs to those who have to make their voices heard amid the deafening roar of storms, some one shouts out:

"By Jove! she has bolted! The Crack has bolted!"

The voice came from one of the naval brigade, who, with his huge double-glasses bracketed on the horses, had followed every incident of the race, and had been the first to detect that the Crack, true to her instincts, had taken the bit between her teeth, and, despite the efforts of Whipcord, was carrying him away from victory, and driving all his backers to despair. Then the cry of "The Crack" ceased, and public favour veering towards the favourite—now some lengths ahead—clamour took another form.

Montjoy Mortimore, pale and panting, slunk silently away.

"To be ruined when so near Fortune! Oh! it is hinhexplicable!—hinhexplicable!"

That same evening two figures strangely muffled up, considering the weather, might have been seen taking their seats in a third-class carriage for London. The slighter of the two was so weak and limp in his movements, that no one would have recognised in him the swaggering, self-asserting Montjoy Mortimore, of Her Majesty's Reserve Forces, of but a few hours before. His companion had a defiant air, and rolled so much as he walked along the platform, that without the strong flavour of brandy which accompanied him, it would have been evident that if he had not succeeded in drowning care, he had at least made locomotion somewhat difficult in the attempt.

On the same platform, and at the same time, a gentleman might have been seen assisting an unmistakably overdressed young lady, with a profusion of golden hair, into a first-class carriage. As he did so, he attracted the attention of two well-dressed men, who were standing in the shadow of a pile of luggage.

"I did not know that Runnymede was such a fool," said the taller of the two.

"It is bad taste, to say the least of it," said his companion. "When a man is married, he ought to have some regard for the convenances."

"And with such a wife!" said the other, with a sigh; he turned his face to the light as he spoke, and disclosed the features of the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps. "He is a beast!" he said; "a confounded beast! I only wish I had had his luck; but we poor younger sons ought not to be allowed to live. No, we should all be drowned!"

CHAPTER III.

SUNSHINE AND GLOOM.

"Oh, Pops! I am so happy!"

Madge was sitting in the arbour with Pops, no longer in his cage, but on a swing-perch by her side.

"Oh, Pops! I am so happy!"

Pops was too busily employed at the time, in investigating the interior economy of a rosebud, to do more than make a kind of clucking noise with his tongue in reply, whilst he brought the bud more closely to his eye in order to examine the surface revealed by the last bite; and there was something in the way in which he accentuated his clucks, which seemed to say: "Oh yes, I know all about it—all about it; but I am tired of hearing it. Do speak of something else."

It is astonishing how much meaning there may be in a "cluck."

"Oh, you dear, stupid old thing! I know you are jealous, and you don't like it; for with all your eyes, you can't read, or play on the accordion, or do half what I can; can you, Pops?"

A contemptuous "Whew" showed that Pops was not inclined to accept such a very low estimate of his powers.

Yes, within the short space of time which had elapsed since Victoria's visit, a great change had taken place in Madge.

She was not only happier, but she looked happier; her face was flushed with happiness. Happiness had driven away her old listlessness, and her voice had no longer a querulous complaining tone, but was vibrating with happiness. The now nearly imbecile mother was still there to throw a shade of sorrowing shame over her child's life. The dissipated, brutal father still came, from time to time, to remind his child of her abhorrence. And yet Madge could say:

"Oh, Pops! I am so happy!"

All was as dark as ever. No light, no

shade ; no sun, no stars. The bright petals which speak to us with their varied beauty—the changing clouds which make us turn our eyes upwards, and raise our thoughts to something higher than ourselves—were not for her. The look of affection—the sweet smile—the responsive glance with which love answers words with a tenderness no words can express—were still denied to her. Apart from its being summer, and not winter, her surroundings were just the same, and yet she could say :

"Oh, Pops ! I am so happy !"

It was Victoria's visit which had produced the change. Victoria, from the first moment she had seen Madge, was attracted towards her in even a greater degree than she was always attracted to those who required sympathy and help. Each day she remained in England, she had spent an hour or two with Madge, and each day found Madge brighter and happier.

"Oh, dear auntie !"—she had decided that Victoria must be a relation, and had asked permission to call her auntie—"Oh, dear auntie !" she said, "I wonder if there are

many more people in the world like you! I love Mr. Pringle, and I love Miss Yorke, but though they are very nice, they are not like my dear auntie."

Before three days were over, it was as if Victoria had given her a new life. In those few days, Victoria had taught her so much. She had told her of the flowers, how they grow; of the trees beginning as little seeds; of the bees which she heard buzzing around her; of the butterflies, who love bright sunshine; of the worms, whose home is in the cold, dark ground.

Whilst teaching Madge, she had taught Chub how to teach. She had brought an alphabet and some books in the raised character for the blind, and she and Chub and Madge sat learning to read by it together; and Madge was filled with glee when, sitting by Chub's side, she could make out the pointed letters before he could.

"Are you quite sure that Mr. Pringle keeps his eyes quite—quite shut?" she would ask.

And there sat Chub with his face screwed up in a comical expression of bewilderment

and intense earnestness, such as never probably had been seen on that face before, trying to make out the little pointed dots with his big fingers.

Madge learned to distinguish the letters much sooner than either he or Victoria did, but she had to be taught to spell, and to learn the meaning of many words; and this had become, since that time, part of Chub's daily work. Mr. Fulford, too, had been enlisted by Victoria. She had made him promise, when the spring was far enough advanced, that he would give her a little garden and show her how to sow seeds in it; and the promise had been religiously kept, and Madge's delight, when she felt the young sprouts pushing their way upwards through the moist, warm earth, was unbounded.

"Oh, Mr. Fulford, come and look! my seeds are growing! Mrs. Fulford, do come! I shall be able to give you some mustard-and-cress. And the lupin has put up a great big head. Oh, how good it is of God to let my seeds grow!"

And as Mr. Fulford looked at the little kneel-

ing form as she turned her face towards him, radiant with excitement and happiness, he whispered to his wife :

"Tibs—if she ain't more like an angel than a child, my name's not John Fulford."

Then Victoria had talked about music, and Chub had bethought him that once, in a musical fit—such as all boys have once in their lives ; perhaps it was inspired by Eva—he had bought an accordion and learnt the notes ; he believed that he had even been able to play a few tunes—and that accordion was at home now. So he sent for it, and taught Madge all he knew ; and he gave her the accordion. And when the weather was wet or cold, and she could not go out, from the parlour-back was sure to be heard the sound of that accordion, and sometimes a little silvery voice singing softly—singing as children sing, not that others may listen and applaud, but out of the overflowing fulness of their own pure hearts—songs often full of meaning, though without words, such as grown-up men and women would sing if they

could, would sing if their voices were not too rough and their hearts too hard.

But Pops hated the accordion; indeed, he did not much like any of the occupations which withdrew Madge's attention from himself. The accordion, however, was something which seemed beyond his powers of endurance; the very sight of it was enough to make him sulk; but when Madge sounded its high notes he became perfectly furious, and expressed his feeling in a series of discordant screams. Then Madge would scold him, and call him a naughty, jealous old bird, and sing a little song to him, which she had made about him:

"Oh, you naughty, jealous bird!
Jealous Popsy, jealous Popsy,
Oh, you nasty, jealous bird!
Dear old Popsy, dear old Popsy,
Go to bed and hide your head,
You naughty, jealous Popsy Wopsy!"

Then sometimes, in the midst of her singing, she would become silent, and her eyes would fill with tears—for across her bright vision, would flit that shade of the poor, weak, suffering mother, who kissed and sobbed over

her night and morning; whose caresses were so distasteful to her; and who drove even her child from the darkened room in which the poor remains of a life which had not reached its prime were flickering away.

Of her uncle she saw less than ever. He had but one thought; he had nearly found it.

"I cannot talk to you to-day," he would say; "wait until to-morrow. Do not tell anyone, my dear Madge. I have all but found it. Come to-morrow."

It was always "to-morrow." But then her thoughts would revert to Victoria. Every word that Victoria had said to her was treasured in her memory; and now once a week a letter came from her, which Chub read, full of kind encouraging words, which Madge added to the other words, until it seemed as if her head were full of them, and her heart had no room for more.

Oh, how she loved to talk to Chub of Victoria! whilst he, poor fellow! was ever thinking of Eva, and would ingeniously turn the conversation upon her. Then Madge, with her child's cunning, seeing through the many

subterfuges by which he managed to make Eva, and not Victoria, the subject of their talk, would tease him, by pretending to think it was Victoria of whom he was speaking; and when he said, as he often did—though not always in the same words—

"The dearest girl in the world, is——"

"Victoria," would Madge, interrupting him, say archly; and then would soothe him by saying she knew Eva was very sweet and nice, but that she loved Victoria better, and that it would not do for them both to be in love with the same person, for then they might be jealous, like old Pops, and quarrel. "Besides, I don't intend Victoria to marry anyone; and I know you want to marry Miss Yorke."

And poor Chub, blushing dreadfully, would say:

"Don't talk nonsense, Madge!" and go on talking of Eva more than ever.

So time had passed very happily with little Madge; and never had a day been happier than the day on which the events that have been described were taking place at Bowood. For on that day she had received a long letter

from Victoria, full of kind counsel and loving thoughts; and she had gone to sleep with a smile, and "Victoria" on her lips.

Before she had known Victoria, all had been dark to her—with little flickers of light here and there, just enough to make the gloom deeper and more horrible. Since she had known her, it was as if a great flood of light had illumined her being—a light growing brighter and brighter with increasing knowledge and awakened consciousness—a light which had given her a mental vision, which had enabled her to fill her heart with the beautiful and the lovable, which had sent her smiling to sleep, with a half-uttered name upon her lips.

Well for those for whom, when so sleeping, there is no awakening.

The next day was wet and gloomy. Chub had gone out early—earlier than usual—for he had some commissions to execute for his father on his way to the hospital; and, what was unusual with him, had done so without seeing Madge, and being cheered with her calling after him, in her clear, silvery voice as

he walked through the passage to the front-door:

"Good-bye, Mr. Pringle. Mind and come back very early—*very!*" with immense emphasis on the word "very."

Perhaps it was that he had not seen her—for to shut the door without carrying away the last notes of that pretty, childlike farewell made him feel as if he had forgotten something; or perhaps it was the dull drizzle out of doors; but a strange sensation came over him—a feeling of apprehension he could not define. Nothing that he did could get rid of it. He could not help wondering what could be the cause of it. Surely it was not because he had not said good-bye to little Madge. The idea was too absurd; and yet, do what he would, it was as if little Madge was ever before him, looking as she had done the evening before, when she had said:

"Good-night, Mr. Pringle. You are so kind, and I am so happy!—so happy that I know now a little—a very little, but still I know—what Mrs. Fulford means when she tells me of heaven. It is not wicked to say

so, is it? Tell me when I am wicked, and I will try to be good."

And it was as she had looked when saying this, that she was always presenting herself to his imagination; looking up at him with her sightless eyes and deep earnest face, throwing back her golden curls as she spoke.

"Poor dear little Madge!"

As soon as his day's work was over he hurried home. He had started on foot, but before he had walked very far, impelled by an irresistible feeling of anxiety, he called a cab. It was a hansom, and the horse was a fast one; but to Chub it seemed that no four-wheeler had ever crawled along so slowly. So impatient was he, that he paid the fare before he had reached the end of his journey; and the instant the cab stopped he jumped out and ran quickly through the garden and up the steps. The door flew open as he approached it; and Mrs. Fulford stood ready to receive him, with her husband a few paces in the background.

A glance at their faces was sufficient to show him that something had happened.

"What is it?" cried Chub, before they had time to speak. "Tell me what is the matter. Is Mrs. Marsh dead?"

"Oh! worse than that, sir—may the Lord forgive me for saying it! They are gone."

"Gone?" echoed Chub. "When? where?"

"They went two hours agone," said Mr. Fulford, "and the Lord knows where."

"And Madge—why did you let her go?" asked Chub, fiercely.

"Law!" said Mrs. Fulford; "law, Mr. Pringle, how you do talk! Fulford may be strong, but he's not strong enough to infract the law."

All this had been said in the passage. In the back parlour Chub learned from Mrs. Fulford—Mr. Fulford standing by—all that had occurred.

"You see, sir," she said, "these trials don't come down upon us all of a sudden-like without warning, and I said to Fulford only this morning, 'I have that feeling come over me, I shouldn't wonder as if something were to be brought down upon us.' 'Bear up, Tibs,' said Fulford—like a man as he is—'don't meet troubles half way; there's no use

striking at the iron till 'tis hot.' So I said no more, but went about my work as usual; but do what I would, I could not get it out of my head—no, that I couldn't—it seemed as if 'twere sent down a purpose. And when I saw you agoing out, I thought it might so be that you might meet with an accident in the streets, or fall from a 'bus, or swallow poison by mistake in the spensary, or catch one of those bad fevers and bring it back, and it made me feel quite cold down the back when I thought of it; but I knew in whose hands we were, and that He would not desert us. But I little thought, as I heard dear little Miss Madge a-singing like a bird, and talking to that odious parrot, who screams enough at times to wake the very dead—may I be forgiven for so speaking!—that the poor dear child was to be taken from us, come that very day; and it was just as the clock was striking——"

"No, it had struck, Tibs," interposed Mr. Fulford.

"Do hold your tongue, John," said his wife; "don't you see Mr. Pringle wants to know what happened, and not hear you talk

about time. And what is time—or clocks, or watches, or chronometers, or such-like—to eternity, John? Think of that, John; think of your—no, John, no! don't ever make light of time."

"Please go on," said Chub mildly, suppressing his impatience, for he knew by experience that any attempt to make Mrs. Fulford come to the point was sure to lead to the opposite result. "Please go on, Mrs. Fulford."

"Well, as I was saying, Mr. Pringle, whilst I was listening to Miss Madge singing like a bird, for I never did hear a voice like hers, and I often thought when the blessed angels sing they must sing—not the words, no, not the words, of course—but in such sweet silver notes; and as she sang and I was a-listening—Fulford had just come in with a hammer in his hand—all of a sudden came a ring at the front-door bell which made me all of a tremble, though I said nothing; but before I could reach the door, it was pulled again. Lord have mercy upon me, I thought, you are in a hurry, whoever you may be; and when I opened the door, without saying with

your leave, or by your leave, in stalked that horrid, dissipated, brokendown, horse-keeping —for I once lived near stables—looking man, Mr. Marsh. 'Shut the door,' says he, as gruff as can be; 'shut the door. How long will it take to pack up? We are going to leave'—*we*, forsooth! 'We are going to leave, and shall be off in an hour.' And there was dear little Miss Madge all the time a-singing in the garden, as blithe as a bird."

But we must tell it in our way, or we shall never get to the end.

The apparition of Mr. Marsh was never the source of pleasure to the members of his family. Now, when his errand had become known it filled them with consternation. For the moment it had the effect of rousing his wife from her state of hopeless lethargy, and she declared firmly that she would not go; but the spirit of resistance soon died out, and returning to her usual state of apathetic listlessness, she allowed herself to be dressed by Mrs. Fulford, much as if she had been a kind of overgrown doll, or a lay figure.

Old Mr. Marsh was as ready as ever to do his nephew's bidding, for he had long ceased

to have a will of his own; and the idea of change seemed to amuse him. He had, however, expressed a wish that the move might have been put off for a day—"only till to-morrow, for by to-morrow I shall have found it, I am so near." But when he was told in rough, brutal tones that they must go at once, he resigned himself to his fate, and devoted himself to arranging and packing up his papers.

Madge, when she heard that they were to leave the only home where she had met with those she really loved, and where she had spent so many happy days, was plunged into a paroxysm of grief. She would do nothing; she seemed as if dead to all around her, as she sat by the side of Pops on the floor in the corner of Chub's back parlour, with her head bent forward and her face hidden by her disordered hair. She had ceased to sob, but silent tears were streaming over her cheeks from those sightless eyes, and her hands hung down helplessly by her side.

Even Pops was silent, and moved noiselessly on his perch, as if afraid to break in upon her sorrow.

"Dear Miss Madge, you must not take on so," said Mrs. Fulford, looking in upon her. "The Lord will not let you out of His hands."

"Oh, Mrs. Fulford, how I wish I could die!"

What could Mrs. Fulford do but take her in her arms, and in her kind, blundering, but tender way, do her best to console her?

"It is only a change," she said; "and Fulford and I will come and see you on Sundays; and Mr. Pringle and me will bring you a nosegay out of the garden. And why shan't you come and see us? for perhaps it won't be far, and Fulford can fetch you by underground or 'bus—or maybe a cab."

"And my garden, and my rose-tree," sobbed Madge. "I love them so!—and oh, Mrs. Fulford, now I am going away, I love you and Mr. Fulford more than I ever did before; and I know sometimes I have been ungrateful and naughty."

Then Mrs. Fulford kissed her, and tears might have been seen rolling down her cheeks as she tried to speak cheerfully; and Madge gave her messages for Chub, and was

able once more to talk so much more like her old self that Pops expressed his satisfaction by a series of taps against the bars of his cage; and Madge, reminded of him, said:

"Dear old Pops, we shall have no nice garden now, but you will be happy, for there will be no Mr. Pringle to be jealous of, you naughty, jealous old creature!"

But Pops repeated in sad, melancholy tones, "Pops has his doubts;" and whether it was the way in which he said it, or the thought of going away without seeing Chub, Madge had burst again into an agony of tears.

Poor Madge! she was not alone in her anguish. At that very moment, myriads of other young lives were being warped and made miserable by irresistible influences against which there is no other power of protest than the silent agony of tears.

Poor Madge! with her natural sense of refinement, her sensitive nature and her loving heart, to have no better guides, companions, and controllers than that dissipated worthless father, that wretched, weak, and

worse than helpless mother, and that poor crazed uncle. What can she do? She is as powerless as the clay in the potter's hands; she has but to submit, to weep, and to ask God, if He be a kind and good and loving God, to let her die.

"Oh, let me die! let me die!" was again the cry.

For young, as well as old, there are times when Death has no terrors—he is no longer a destroyer, but a benefactor.

In little more than an hour a cab was at the door. Its roof was piled with luggage, and on the seat near the driver was a parrot in a cage.

Mr. Marsh was the last to get in.

"Please, sir, what address, in case of letters?" asked Mr. Fulford, as he closed the door.

"D—n the letters!" said Mr. Marsh. "I don't want any letters. Burn them."

* * * * *

"And don't you know where they have gone?" asked Chub, when Mrs. Fulford had finished her story.

"Not in the least, sir," she answered rue fully.

Chub was struck with a happy thought.

"Mr. Fulford, did you take the number of the cab?"

No, Mr. Fulford had not. How could he have been such a fool as not to have done so! His anger against himself was so strong for his neglect, that it was with a word which sounded very like a naughty one that he confessed to it.

"Dang it, no! What a great, big, blundering fool I am!—I never thought of that."

"What is to be done?" asked Chub.

"What, indeed?" echoed Mr. and Mrs. Fulford, in the same breath.

Then there was a pause.

"We must ask for direction," said Mrs. Fulford.

"How could I have been such an oaf as not to have taken the number!" said her husband.

"What will Eve say?" muttered Chub. I will sit down and write to Victoria."

CHAPTER IV.

LOST AND FOUND.

CHUB's letter filled Victoria with dismay. Since the day on which she had first seen Madge, her interest in her had increased, until she had begun to regard herself as her natural protector. It was delightful for her to think that she was gradually developing the latent powers of the poor neglected child; and now to find that she was withdrawn from her influence, and that the loving care of such friends as Chub and Mr. and Mrs. Fulford was no longer hers. What could have become of her?

Each letter she received from Chub was more hopeless than the preceding one; yet he had done all in his power to find her; but London is a large place, and for those who

wish to hide themselves in it, hiding is made very easy.

She began to think that Chub's inexperience might be the cause of his want of success. She thought of asking Dr. Pringle, but she hesitated, for she knew how difficult it was for him to leave his patients. But there was Sir Francis—he was in London, and she knew she could rely upon him to do all he could, not only for the poor child's sake, but for hers. What more natural than that she should write to him ?

"I feel," she said, "that before long, the dear child will be alone with that most miserable father, for it is impossible that the life of the poor wretched mother can be prolonged; and what a sad, sad fate for her to have no other protector than that horrible man, and no other companion than her imbecile old uncle! It makes my heart bleed when I think of her. If her whereabouts could be found, it is possible the father would be glad to get rid of her; and I am quite ready—more than ready, most anxious—to assume all the responsibilities connected with her care, and if any money difficulties stand

in the way, to meet them so far as I possibly can. I know that you will do your best to help me to find her; but there is no time to be lost—it is indeed a matter of life and death."

Sir Francis was in London at the time, attending strictly to his parliamentary duties, for with him being in Parliament meant something more than the privilege of having two letters attached to his name. And so successful had he been, on the one or two occasions on which he had addressed the House, that he was already spoken of with respect as one of the coming men.

On receiving Victoria's letter, he wrote to say he would not "leave a stone unturned," and set to work in earnest to discover Mr. Marsh's whereabouts. But all his efforts were vain. He was not one whit more successful than Chub had been. One night, however, on leaving the Lyceum, where he had been to see Irving in "Charles the First," heavy rain having come suddenly on, and there being a great dearth of cabs, a shabbily dressed man offered to fetch one. As Sir Francis was about to give him something for

his trouble, it struck him the man's face was familiar to him.

"Surely, my good fellow, I have seen you before?"

The man hesitated for a moment, then touching his hat respectfully:

"To tell you the truth, Sir Francis—for now I see it is you—I would rather have preserved my hincognito; for life has many ups and downs, and when we are down—as I am hunfortunately now, and very low down too—hexperience teaches us that the world does not regard hindigence as a virtue."

"What, Mortimer! Surely you have not come to this?"

"Indeed I have, sir. I was hambitious—and——"

"Jump in," said Sir Francis, interrupting. "You are the very man I want to see."

From Mr. Mortimer, with whose career on the turf and as a man about town Sir Francis had become acquainted, he had hoped to have obtained some information about Mr. Marsh; but Mr. Mortimer could tell him very little; he had only seen him once—and that by

accident, late one evening in the Strand—since that dreadful Bowood.

"He was hardly to be called sober when I saw him," said Mr. Mortimer. "Indeed, hintoxication is his habit; he was a-swaggering with drink, and haccosted me with such hepithets that I did not care to remain in his company; but he told me that his wife was dead, and that he was going to take the old fool and the brat, as he called them, to Hamerica."

"How long was this ago?" asked Sir Francis.

"About three months," said Mr. Mortimer; "and he did swear most hawful."

"And he gave you no clue to where he was living?" asked Sir Francis.

"None, sir; and I did not care to ask, feeling that, in his haltered circumstances, he was beneath my notice."

Finding he could get no further information from Mr. Mortimer, Sir Francis dismissed him with a handsome present. He had asked if he were going into service again, and if he could help him.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Mr. Mor-

timer, "not just yet; I am not yet reconciled to the change in my condition, and to tell you honestly the truth, sir, do not at present dare to hemerge from my hobscurity. But the time will come, sir, when Montjoy Mortimore, of Her Majesty's Reserve Forces, will be forgotten; and then John Mortimer will venture to hobtrude himself upon you in his old character as an honest man, and ask you to assist him to realise his humble haspirations."

Sir Francis lost no time in causing inquiries to be made at all the ports from which it was likely Mr. Marsh might have sailed, but he could gain no tidings of anyone answering to his description.

The only intelligence he was able to give Victoria was that which he had heard from Mr. Mortimer, and his anxiety on the poor child's account became very great.

And so the autumn had passed away, and it was again winter—mid-winter. Winter, with his wind and wet, and snow and storm; Winter, with his gloomy frown and chilly breath; Winter, with icy hands binding up Nature's bosom in his iron bonds; Winter,

scattering suffering broadcast o'er the land, amongst the poor, the old, the weak.

It was a cold, cruel winter. For many who lived by labour there was no work, and without work there was no bread. Strong men and women broke down under his hard hand; poverty yielded to temptation under the pressure of cold and hunger; the workhouses were filled, the hospitals could take no more, gaunt starving forms stalked about the streets; but the hidden misery, the misery which shuts itself close from the sight of others, was the deepest misery, the misery most difficult to bear.

It was a cold, cruel winter. People were known to drop down dead in the streets; children were found frozen to death on doorsteps; no one claimed the poor stiffened bodies, no one was found to tell from whence they came. A few lines in the police report; a notice in the paragraph before which the word "inquest" stands in large letters, and the miserable deaths of some dozen people is half detailed in smaller ones; a pauper's grave—another life has glided down and been engulphed in the stream of time. Not even a

bubble upon its surface, but for a moment's space, to show where it had been.

A cold, cruel winter. Thousands and tens of thousands shivering, and cowering, and starving, in the neighbourhood of the great theatre for which Fashion, clad in warm furs, relinquishes her luxurious home; within a stone's-throw of the comfortable church in which Faith, sheltered from draughts, raises her eyes to heaven; not a dozen yards from the hospital built by Charity, and pointed to by the pride which walks hand in hand with benevolence. Faith typified by the Church, Charity by the hospital—but Hope?

Alas for many of these thousands and tens of thousands, too young to be guilty, too weak to be criminal, too old to be capable of change! with all our Faith, with all our Charity, there is no Hope.

Mr. Marsh had not left England. He had made no less than four changes of residence since he had removed his family from Woodbine Terrace, and each move had been a downward one. The sudden shock of the first change had been too much for his wife, and

she only outlived it a few days. The expenses connected with her death had necessitated a move to cheaper quarters, and Mr. Marsh, having no resources of his own, was constrained—it must be confessed much against his will—to return to live as he had done before, with his old uncle, for his old uncle had the advantage of still enjoying his weekly pension. He would have preferred the money without the uncle, but as that could not be, he had to put up with him ; and as he knew that he would probably starve without him, the preservation of such a life became a matter of some importance. He took, therefore, just sufficient care of the poor, imbecile old man, as might give him a fair chance of being enabled to spend his pension for him for some few years longer. But to his child he was more than indifferent; he hated her, and she had no pension. In his present house—the fifth—situated in a squalid neighbourhood in the outskirts of London, he had furnished three rooms in the most meagre manner. "It does not matter about its being comfortable, I shan't be much at home," he had said.

Anything was good enough for his child—his blind brat, as he called her. "Take care of the old man, and see that he gets something warm for his dinner," he would say to the dirty, miserable woman he had hired for a servant. "The old man's life is valuable, but the sooner the blind brat dies the better." He had no other feeling than that of bitter hatred towards his poor afflicted child. He hated her because, weak and blind as she was, he feared her; hated her because in her presence he felt his own degradation, and was humiliated into a sense of shame.

The season of Christmas had passed. The shops had exhibited their abundance, and the lounger through the streets, as he saw those countless carcases of fat bullocks and fat sheep—those myriads of fat turkeys, and fat geese, and plump fowls—those piles of fresh turbot, and huge cod, and soles, and barrelled oysters—those long rows of pheasants, and hares, and wild-fowl, competing with each other, and against hams, and sausages, and loins of pork, and dainty little pigs, might well ask, "Is there not food for all? Is it possible, whatever may take place at other

times, that there can be one case of starvation now ?"

Christmas ! the season when Plenty feasts, and Abundance displays itself to hungry eyes; when Poverty fasts, and Want hides its death-stamped face.

Christmas had passed, but it had brought nothing but gloom to little Madge. To her, now, all seasons would have been alike, were it not that winter was cold. And as she sat shivering and cowering in a corner of the wretched room which answered the double purpose of a sitting-room by day and her bedroom by night, she thought of the little back parlour, and of Mr. Pringle, and of Victoria, and of all she had lost ; and then tears would roll silently down her cheeks, for now hers was a life of sighs and tears—of nought but sighs and tears.

There, in a corner of that wretched room, she remained huddled together, hour after hour ; not the bright, well-cared-for child of a few months since, but with pale, sunken, sallow cheeks, with eyes made more dull through their hollowness, with neglected hair, and torn and shabby clothes.

It was early in the afternoon of one of these mid-winter days—though it was almost dark, so dense was the cold, thick fog—that Madge sat crouching in her usual corner, silent, listless, and helpless. She might have been asleep, she was so motionless, but that from time to time she turned towards the cage upon the floor within her reach, and guiding her hand by its bars, placed it caressingly upon Pops, who, with drooping head and ruffled feathers, was perched upon it. And sometimes when she did so, she would say, in a soft, silvery whisper: "Dear, dear Pops!" and then the bird, as if in answer, would rub his head gently against her hand and peck at it lovingly; and had there been light enough in that dark, fog-filled room, it might have been seen that his feathers had become smooth, and that his eyes had contracted with pleasure, and that he kissed her finger again and again with his smooth, black tongue. Then too a tear might have been seen rolling down her cheek, as she repeated: "Dear, dear Pops! you are my only friend now;" and then correcting herself, and as if angry with herself for her forgetfulness: "and my poor, dear

old uncle." For not far from her sat the bent, wistful-looking old man, with his eyes fixed on vacancy, from time to time holding out his trembling hands towards the expiring embers in the broken and rusty grate, or folding and unfolding a paper which he took out of his pocket furtively, and as furtively returned.

The fire was going out, and he was shivering, but he did not attempt to stir it—he only drew his chair nearer and nearer to it; and he did this so noiselessly, looking anxiously at the child the while, as if he thought she might be asleep and was afraid of awakening her. When she moved and caressed the parrot, his face assumed a timid, conscious expression, as if he had disturbed her; but when he heard her speak to the bird, his poor, worn face lightened up, and he looked at her affectionately, and nodded many times, as if he would have said: "And your poor old uncle loves his little Madge too, but he is too busy now to talk; only wait until he has found it."

He is now so near—so very near—he does not even speak of "to-morrow."

He was thus nodding, screwing up his poor old wrinkled face into an expression of mingled shyness and tenderness as he did so, when a heavy step was heard upon the stairs. In an instant the whole manner of the old man changed; he pushed his chair rapidly back to the side of the fire farthest from the corner in which Madge was sitting, and in his nervous desire to appear to be at ease, and to be occupied with anything else but the poor blind child, began to button and unbutton his coat with the most praiseworthy assiduity.

But he was not the only one who was startled by that step, for no sooner had Madge heard it, than, with a movement which was so sudden that it was almost convulsive, she held out her hand to the cage, and in an instant Pops was upon it, and in another nestling in her bosom; he, too, was under the influence of that step, for he had fluttered his wings and stretched out his head towards her the instant it had sounded on the stairs.

The step was that of Mr. Marsh. He had gone out only a short time before, but it seems that he had forgotten something, and

he had returned more out of temper and more brutal than usual.

The first object upon which he turned his wrath was his child.

"What are you moping in that corner for, with that beast of a bird? It gives me the blue devils to look at you."

It seemed as if Pops had understood what he had said, for though Madge could feel him trembling in every limb, he put his head forward and opened his beak with a threatening gesture in the direction where Mr. Marsh was standing. It may be that Mr. Marsh had observed it, and it had added to his irritation, for he came at once towards Madge.

"Come," he said, "I am not going to have any more of this nonsense! When I am away, you may sit whimpering in that corner as long as you like, but when I am at home, I will have nothing of the kind. You could be merry enough when you were with that unlicked cub of a Sawbones; and I'll teach you better manners now, or know the reason why." And as Madge neither moved nor answered: "Oh, you are in the sulks, miss,

are you? Come, I'll have no more of this humbug: get up at once!"

As he spoke, he stooped down and seized her roughly by the arm, but he had no sooner done so than he released her, and stepped backwards with a volley of oaths—for his hand had scarcely touched her when Pops had rushed at him with a shrill scream, and bitten one of his fingers to the bone.

His retreat was but momentary.

"Curse you and your grey devil!" he said, in a voice hoarse with passion, as he again came towards her. "I wish I could wring both your necks at once; but one, at all events, shall go to kingdom come."

The child had shrunk instinctively from him, and folded the still screaming Pops closely in her arms, but her father, shaking her roughly with his left hand, struck the bird fiercely to the ground with his right.

A stifled cry; a dull crashing thud; and Pops was dead. He had been crushed under the brutal father's heel the moment he had touched the floor.

"There!" he said, lifting up the mangled

body of the bird and flinging it in Madge's face, "take your pet!"

The child uttered no cry—no sound—but pressing the poor bird's body to her lips, turned round on her face and lay prostrate on the floor. She could not see that the old man had risen, and stood erect before her father. She did not hear that he had said:

"Shame upon you! Is it not enough for you to have lamed your mother, that you must now needs kill your child? Monster, go!"

His eyes flashed with indignation as he spoke, and it was difficult to recognise in the tall, erect man, whose voice had lost all its weakness, the poor, bowed-down, timid creature who had been trembling but a few minutes before with fear and the infirmity of age.

The wretched bully was cowed for an instant, and slunk towards the door; but before he had passed through it he had recovered his blustering and defiant air.

"You chattering old fool!" he said; "who told you to speak? You are only fit for

Bedlam; and you would have been there long ago, had it not been for your money."

He went out of the room as he said this, and the violent slamming of the front-door showed that he had left the house.

The old man had remained standing. As his nephew spoke the last words he shrunk together and became once more a feeble, tottering, helpless creature—so shaken and agitated that he had to support himself against the chimney-piece near which he stood.

"Oh, if I had but found it!" he murmured. "If I had but found it! But it is so near—so near!"

There was silence for a space. Not a sound—not even a sob from Madge! She might have been dead, she lay so still. Then the old man, under the fear, perhaps, that she was so, moved across the room to the corner where she lay, and stooping down and stroking her soft, dishevelled hair, said gently:

"Madge, my darling, speak! Speak to your poor old uncle! Do not be angry with him, because he—he is weak, and old, and

silly, and could not help you. Your poor old uncle, who loves you better than all the world."

A low moan from Madge was the only answer; but the old man's words seemed to have restored her to herself, for she turned round and, placing the dead Pops in her lap, sat up against the wall.

"Sit down, uncle dear," she said. "Sit down by me close—quite close—I want to talk to you." And when the old man had placed himself on the ground by her side, she threw her arms round his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder, and then, and not before, burst into a flood of tears. "But I will not cry, uncle dear," she said, suddenly restraining herself. "What good is crying? it will not punish that wicked, bad man! And I shall never hear dear Pops again—never!—never! I do not want to live without Pops! And I cannot die, for God will not let me! Oh, it is very unkind of God not to let me die, though I asked Him and prayed to Him when I knew Pops was dead. Why did not that wicked man kill me too?"

"Oh! Madge, he is your father," said the old man, gently.

"He is not," said Madge; "I will not have him. I hate him! hate him! hate him!" she said, raising her voice. Then, suddenly changing her tone, "Come, uncle dear, put your things on, quick! —we must go."

"Go?" asked the old man, ruefully.

"Yes," said Madge, "we must go. I will not stay. We ought to have gone before; and then that wicked man would not have killed my darling."

"But where are we to go?"

"Why, to Mr. Fulford's, to be sure; and there we shall see Mr. Pringle, and I shall have letters from Victoria, and I will bury my darling in my garden under the sweet-briar-tree, and I will sit by him when the sun shines, and talk to him just as I used to talk to him; but I shall never hear my darling's voice again—no, never! Come, uncle dear—be quick!—we must go."

"But I do not know the way," said the old man, as if he felt powerless to resist her.

"Then we must find it, uncle dear," said the child.

The words seemed to strike upon the chord which was ever vibrating in the old man's mind:

"Ah! if we shall find it—if we shall find it!"

It was as if no further objection could be made. He was impatient to set out at once.

They were soon ready. Madge in a scanty cloak, with poor Pops wrapped up in the only silk handkerchief she had, pressed against her heart; the old man buttoned up in his threadbare coat, with a comforter round his neck. They met the slatternly servant on the stairs.

"What, going out!" she cried, in astonishment. "Why, Mr. Marsh, you will catch your death of cold, and the fog is that thick you might cut it with a knife."

She would have persuaded him to return, but he pushed her aside; he seemed to have regained all his strength now that he was going to "find it."

Holding Madge by the hand he walked on, now turning to the right, now turning to the left. The fog was thick, but he did not heed it. There was no hesitation in his movements. No one observing him would have

suspected that he did not know where he was going.

Madge, too, had regained all her old confidence in him. For the time, he was no longer her poor foolish old uncle. She never asked herself how they were to find the way. She only knew they were going to Mrs. Fulford's, and that if they walked on and on she would see Mr. Pringle. But from time to time she would ask :

"And is it very far, uncle ?"

But her uncle did not know; he only knew that if they walked on and on they must get there at last.

Strange that he, who of late had been so taciturn and silent, talked as he strode along incessantly—now to his little niece, now to himself; now as if some one, whom Madge did not know, was walking by his side. When they passed through the larger thoroughfares, Madge could only hear his voice without catching the words; but when, as was often the case, they were in quiet back streets, and only heard the roar of the great city in the distance, she listened to him with wonder. She had never heard him talk

like that before. But yet it made her think of what he had once told her—of the curse. That terrible curse.

"Madge," he said, suddenly, "do you know this is my birthday? Your old uncle's birthday;" and before she could answer, and say how glad she was:

"Yes, Madge, so old, so poor, so weak now; fifty years ago I was young and rich and strong, and I had a young wife, Madge—a beautiful young wife and a child—oh, my God! a child!"

And when he paused for a moment, Madge clinging to him, and forgetting for awhile her own grief:

"Oh, uncle dear! is it all true?"

"Madge," he said, as he stooped down towards her, "I will tell you. I can tell you now, for the fog is thick and dark, and no one can see us, and there is no one to hear it. I broke her heart—broke my beautiful young wife's loving heart—for she loved me. Yes, and I loved her more than she knew, more than I can tell—and yet I broke her heart."

"Oh, uncle dear! I do not believe it," said Madge. "You are too kind."

"I tell you I did," said the old man angrily, as if impatient of contradiction. "I tell you I did—I was under the curse—the curse that is in our blood—and I became a gambler, and drank and swore and went on from bad to worse; and she died, and I shall never see her more. And the curse was in the blood of my child—my Violet—and she left me, and I heard that she too had died; and I became more wild and reckless, and I lost my fortune. What cared I? I had lost all I loved. What cared I? Then you came, Madge, and for your sake I would have been rich again; and one night the devil stood by my bed and promised that I should find it—find the way to become rich again; and day and night I have sought for it, for your sake, Madge—for your sake—and now it is so near—so near."

Before Madge could speak they had reached a busy street, and his voice was drowned in the sound of wheels; when next she could distinguish what he was saying he was no longer speaking to her—he was talking to some one else—to some one whom he called Margaret, and to whom he spoke as if she too were walking by his side.

"Margaret," he said, "I will not have it. It was not I who made your son what he is. It was the curse in his blood—in our blood—in your blood. What else was it that drove your husband from you? what else made your son hate you from his birth? You may be as gentle as you please now, it will not recall the past. You sowed hate, and wanted to reap love. You were hard and cold and cruel then—what matter if your heart be softened now? What matter if I did teach your boy to swear and to drink and to gamble—did I give him the temper of a fiend? I tell you I will not have it! And for twenty years have I not sheltered him, when you have cast him off? Have I not drunk water that he might drink wine? and starved and stinted—and for what? in order that the selfish wretch might continue in his wickedness—to nourish the monster that you should have strangled in his birth."

He had said this with fierce energy. It was in soft, tremulous tones—speaking as if he were breaking the silence for the first time—that he asked:

"Madge, my darling, are you tired?"

"A little, uncle dear," she said; "a very little."

"Are your feet wet?"

Madge was obliged to confess that her feet were wet—for her shoes were thin and worn, and the water oozed into them at every step.

"A little," she again murmured. "Shall we soon be there?"

"Of course we shall," he said; "we have only to walk on till we find it—walk on till we find it!"

And then again he began to talk in low tones to himself. She could only hear:

"Yes, she shall have it all—she shall be rich—little Madge—like the lilies of the field—clothed in glory—a little longer—but a little longer—wait until it is found—then death——oh, most welcome death!"

Madge was becoming very tired; they had walked for more than an hour; her feet were cold and sore, and she felt hungry and faint. They were passing a baker's shop.

"Uncle," she asked, "have you any money? I should so like a piece of bread."

He bought her a small loaf, and they

walked on ; but it was at a slower pace than before, and the old man had become silent. Suddenly he stopped.

"I want strength, child," he said, "strength. I am old and weak. I must have strength, or I shall never find it. Stay here for a moment."

He left her standing helpless and alone, but it was pleasant to stop : her feet were sore, and her legs ached so dreadfully ; besides, she was still hungry, for as they had walked along she had only been able to eat a few mouthfuls ; now she would have finished the little loaf, but the thought of the poor dead Pops made her feel as if she could not swallow. No, she could eat no more.

She was beginning to be anxious, standing alone in that dreary street. It was getting quite dark, but she did not know it; she only knew that she was alone. And now, for the first time, she began to feel afraid. She suddenly remembered what Mrs. Fulford had said about her poor old uncle's silliness.

Could it be that he could not find the way, and that they would never get there? What would become of them? They could

not stay out all night in the cold—she must sit down soon, she could not walk much farther. Oh, if dear Pops were still alive! Though dead, it was a comfort to have him with her. Poor Pops! she thought of how gentle and loving he had been only just before her cruel father had killed him. She thought no more of being footsore and cold and tired. She was not thinking of herself, but of Pops, when she burst into tears.

But she heard steps. Could they be her uncle's? No, they were too firm and quick. But she was mistaken. He once more took her by the hand.

"Madge," he said, and as he spoke she detected the horrible smell of spirits which had been one of the tortures of her young life, "we must walk on quickly—I am quite strong now—and we shall soon find it." Then he muttered to himself, "The first time for twenty years — the first time for twenty years."

He walked on so quickly she could hardly keep up with him, and yet he urged her to walk faster. It seemed to Madge that the air had become purer, and that they must

have left the streets and entered some open space, and she thought as they hurried along that she heard at times the distant plash of water. And this greatly puzzled Madge, for when she had walked out with Mr. and Mrs. Fulford she had never heard this sound. Where could they be?

"Oh, uncle—dear uncle!" she cried; "is it far? I am so tired."

"Only a little farther, Madge," he said; "we shall soon be there, my darling; I see it before me."

"See what?" asked Madge.

"The great palace with its tall tower, and the great clock-face on fire, looking down upon us. Mercy upon us, Madge, did you hear nothing?"

"What, uncle—what?" asked Madge, now thoroughly frightened.

"Hush! don't speak," said the old man, pulling her along. "The devil is at work—we are followed."

A vague terror seized upon the child. Was it her infuriated father who was following them, and would he kill them as he had killed Pops? Her fear gave her strength.

"Let us run, uncle," she said, urging the old man forward in her terror.

They had for some little time been walking along the Thames Embankment in the direction of Westminster, and as they hurried onward they came to the bridge. The old man stopped when they had reached it.

"Madge," he said, "they are gone; I knew they would not catch us, the cowards! and here we are at last, close—close!"

He turned upon the bridge as he spoke.

"Madge," he said, "something tells me that this very night, this very hour, I am to find it; who knows how soon?"

"But, uncle dear," she cried, "this is not Mr. Fulford's. Oh, do pray take me to Mr. Fulford's!"

There was an agony of apprehension in her appeal.

He did not answer her. He was again talking to himself.

"Oh, do pray take me to Mr. Fulford's!" she repeated.

Many people were crossing over the bridge. But it so happened that one side of it was comparatively clear.

"Come, Madge, there is no time to be lost," said the old man, crossing over to it.

The child's courage had left her; all her weariness had returned; and it was with difficulty that he could drag her on.

"Oh, uncle, we shall never find it," she cried.

"It is a lie—a base lie, child!" he shouted; "it is there! I see it now; it is floating on the water; it shall not escape me; I have won at last!"

He released her hand, she heard a sound as of some one clambering over a wall; then, as if in the distance, a faint cry—it was her uncle's voice—of "Found!"

There was a confused murmur of many voices, the rush of many feet.

"What is the matter?" "What is it?" "What's up?"

"Only an old bloke been and throwed himself into the river."

"'Ope he likes it."

Madge, with outstretched arms, had staggered forward towards the roadway, and missing her step as she reached the lower level, had fallen heavily to the ground. When she

was picked up, it was seen that she was bleeding from a cut across the forehead, for her head had struck the curb, and that she was senseless.

A policeman had come upon the scene. "Does anyone know the girl?" he asked.

"Don't say if you knows, Bill," said the owner of the voice which had spoken before, to his neighbour.

"Not I. I'm not so jolly green; I don't want to be inquested."

"What's to be done?" asked the policeman of his sergeant, as he came up.

"Take her to the hospital. Take her to St. Tobias's."

CHAPTER V.

A LOAD OFF A LOVING HEART.

VICTORIA was alone in her room at Zurich. A bright, cheerful room, with windows overlooking the peaceful dove-coloured lake.

On the table a vase, with a nosegay of tastefully arranged wild flowers; on the walls a few well-selected prints and photographs, the largest of which was a good copy of that marvellous picture, which is well worth a journey to the Hague to see, the "Lecture on Anatomy," by Rembrandt. Many books were scattered about, some in German, some in English, some in French, principally in prose, though there was a sprinkling of poetry. On one side of the room a console, with a few nicknacks; by the window a work-table, on which lay a piece of unfinished embroidery;

and near it, placed in a carefully chosen light, an easel, with a landscape in water-colours, the last touches of which were not yet dry.

The only sign that this was a student's room was to be found in the large book-case, occupying nearly the whole of the wall-space between the door and the windows, filled with books which required to be studied rather than read—books on the Natural Sciences, Natural History, Anatomy, Medicine and Surgery—ranged on the shelves in the most perfect order. Amongst the books on Surgery there was a vacant space, one volume was absent; but it lay on a chair by the side of the easel, and a glance at the illustrations on its open pages showed that it was a treatise on diseases of the eye.

It was quite clear that Victoria had not forgotten Madge.

Just now she was standing by the window, with an open letter in her hand. It was from Sis, for of late Sis had taken to writing to Victoria. At first in a most mournful strain, for the curate with the "dreamy" eyes had suddenly taken it into his wise head

that it was his duty to join a mission for the conversion of the heathen in the interior of Africa, and so had departed one fine morning with a beard of three weeks growth, and a portmanteau labelled "Timbuctoo." Thrown once more upon her own resources, what could Sis do better in her desolation but seek for comfort from Victoria?

It must be confessed that Victoria was just then too much occupied with her work and her anxiety about Madge to give her much; and happily, in a short time, consolation had ceased to be needed, for there was suddenly a rift in the cloud caused by the curate's cruel conduct. The incumbent of Slocum-cum-Magnus, the Reverend St. John Softridge, was made a dean, and his successor, the Reverend Aloysius Kempster, was, although verging on middle age, still unmarried. What a chance for Sis! She opened the trenches at once; in a short time the line of circumvallation was complete, her guns in position, and nothing remained but to pour an overwhelming fire of shot and shell into the citadel. And all this time she must needs keep boring—it is the only word—Victoria,

who had other things to think of, with her letters.

She had first tried Chub, but a single letter from him had put a stop to the correspondence. And no wonder, for Sis, not content with having, under the influence of the Reverend Aloysius, forsaken her own parish church for his, and joined some kind of sisterhood which gave her the privilege of wearing suspended round her neck a lozenge-shaped medallion with mystic characters, and of attaching certain letters of the alphabet to her signature, must forsooth make use of this latter privilege when writing to Chub, to practical, unsentimental — always putting Eva on one side—matter-of-fact Chub. She ought to have known what it would have led to, and she need not have been so *very* angry when he wrote back to ask for an explanation, saying "that although the first three letters were perfectly familiar to him, and perhaps appropriate to her, the others were beyond his comprehension."

But she was very angry, and it is not to be wondered at that the correspondence closed with a letter from her in which his conduct

was characterised as unkind, ungentlemanly, vulgar, and *profane*, with three dashes under the last word.

Now, Sis was in earnest—at least she thought she was—and so was never weary of lamenting over the frivolity of her former life. But then she had not had the advantage of the Reverend Aloysius Kempster's ministrations; now she was for ever trudging through the mud to Slocum for matins, for vespers, for primes, or for some other of the many services which it had been the heart's delight of the Reverend Aloysius to institute.

"Oh, Victoria," she wrote, "what a comfort it is, that if we cannot have daily services in our own parish church, Slocum is within walking distance! and though it takes up the greater part of the morning, I don't think I have missed it more than twice, and then through having a cold, during the last month. The only thing which makes me feel unhappy about it is that papa does not quite like it—though, good, dear, kind old creature that he is, he does not say much, but I know he

does not like it—and were it not that Mr. Kempster has pointed out to me what my duty is, in such a clear and unmistakable manner that I should be grievously wrong were I not to do it, I fear I should never have had the courage to have persevered. I wish you could have heard Mr. Kempster's last sermon: it was upon faith; and he pointed out how little faith there was at the present time, and what a falling off there had been since those days when such numbers of men and women gave up the world, and, separating themselves from their families and friends, devoted themselves to pious meditation under the guidance of the holy Church; when prayer was looked upon as the first and chief duty of life, and science was made subservient to a higher teaching, which kept it in its proper place, so that it was from the pulpit and not from the professor's chair that the world was taught. He said all this so simply that my heart was deeply touched, and I have felt better ever since."

"Poor little Sis," said Victoria, as she put

down the letter. "What would Mr. Kempster say to such a teaching as this?" She took up a book from the table and read aloud: "'Work is the great end of man's existence, and faith shows itself in work better than in words. But the work must be based upon the cultivation and employment of every divine gift, so that man may be enabled to move on towards a higher state by endeavouring to find out those unchangeable laws which best teach him the Will of that Great Being to whom obedience is the most acceptable worship. That faith, when so working, is blessed, there can be no room for doubt; for, though man may not be able to move mountains, knowledge working with faith has enabled him to pierce them—nay more, it has enabled him to give sight to the blind, to make the deaf hear, the dumb to speak, and even to raise those who, without its aid, were dead to life.'

"I like this theology best," she said, as she replaced the book on the table; "but now to work."

She seated herself at the work-table, and

in a short time was completely absorbed in her embroidery, and the contents of the treatise on the eye. There was no room for thoughts of Sis.

Now it always had been one of Dr. Pringle's jokes, that Sis must marry a fool.

"Indeed you must," he would say; "if you were to marry a sensible man he would beat you."

And yet he loved her as the apple of his eye; and perhaps, so inscrutable is human nature, loved her all the better for her weakness. And soon, though he called him a "simpleton," the new rector of Slocum-cum-Magnus became endurable to him; for he could not deny that he was an amiable, well-intentioned fellow; and he had it not in his heart to think unkindly of a man who began to give unmistakable signs of being in love with Sis. For almost before the batteries had opened fire, the citadel had capitulated. And from that time forward the Rev. Aloysius Kempster stood before the world as the future husband of the happy Sis. And it is remarkable that henceforward Dr. Pringle was no more heard

expressing his wonder that Nature could have been so eccentric as to create brains incapable of producing higher thoughts than belong to ceremonies and vestments.

There was one point connected with the Rev. Aloysius Kempster's engagement which had somewhat exercised many of the members of his congregation: he had always given out that priests ought not to marry; and Sis had professed to think so too.

No one knew by what arguments they had been induced to change their opinions; for it was a subject on which, as it were with a tacit understanding, they both held their tongues.

A letter announcing the engagement to Victoria was being penned by Sis, at the very time that the former had seated herself at her work-table and become absorbed in her embroidery and in the contents of the treatise on the eye.

But when it came she had very little time to give to thoughts of Sis; for whilst she was still working and reading, a telegram had been brought her. It was from Chub:

"Have found her! She is safe. Will write."

"Thank God!" said Victoria.

She felt as if a load had been taken off her heart.

CHAPTER VI.

REVELATIONS.

TIME has rolled on. The year has again grown old.

The cold, cruel Winter had shrunk away before the warm breath of Spring. Spring had lost her youth, and ripened into Summer under Sol's fierce wooing; and when he had turned from her, and was once more travelling to the distant south, Summer, arraying herself as Autumn, had sought to hold him by a richer beauty; but he fleeing from her with greater swiftness, Autumn, desolate and forsaken, had cast off her variegated vestments, and robing herself in russet weeds, had again fallen, shivering and shuddering, into hoar Winter's outstretched arms.

A bright fire burnt in the snug, cosy dining-room of Deepdale.

On opposite sides of it sat Dr. Pringle and Sir Francis Hawthorne. It was evident that the ladies had only that moment left the room, for the worthy doctor was just settling himself in his chair, after having drawn the table nearer the fire, so as to bring the decanters within his reach.

"This is what I like," said the doctor, rubbing his hands: "a cheerful fire, when one hears the wind, as we do now, roaring without; a good glass of wine after a good dinner; and above all, a companion like you, Sir Francis, to whom I can talk freely, and in whom I know I possess a friend who takes a sufficient interest in my affairs not to be bored when I talk a little too much about them. I suppose all men at my age like talking—but talking at any age is only agreeable when you have a sympathetic listener."

"Am I a good listener?" asked Sir Francis, smiling. "I thought talking was rather my forte."

"Not at all," said the doctor; "by a good listener I do not mean a silent, but a re-

sponsive one. In this you are not like my good friend—I suppose I must call him so, now that he is about to become my son-in-law—who has forsaken our society for that of the ladies. He is a most patient, I might indeed say, a most deferential, listener; but to talk to him, is about as pleasant as striking a chord upon a piano of which half the notes are dumb—the more you thump, the less music you get out of it."

"He is a good, well-meaning fellow," said Sir Francis.

"I really believe there is good in him—if it were not so, he should not have Sis; but as to his being well-meaning, half the evil that is to be found in this world is to be laid at the door of well-meaning people. Between ourselves, the man is an ass; but dear little Sis has set her mind upon having him for her husband; and she is now old enough, if not wise enough, to choose for herself. And if the Rev. Aloysius had been a Solomon, he might not perhaps have fallen over head and ears in love with Sis. She is my child, and I love her dearly, but I am not blind to her faults and failings. I wish it had been different."

The doctor poured out a glass of wine, and passed the bottle. He was silent for a moment; had his thoughts been revealed, it would have been seen that his companion had had some place in them, and that of all men, Sir Francis was the husband he would have chosen for Sis.

"Yes, he is a good fellow," he resumed, with a sigh, as if only now answering Sir Francis's remark; "and his mission is evidently to minister to those whose intellects are too weak to make the ministrations of stronger minds acceptable; and we must not forget that the thousand millions who inhabit this earth have been truly said to be mostly fools. What a contrast between Sis and Victoria!" he added, as if speaking to himself.

"I sometimes think," said Sir Francis, "that the capacity possessed by different people is rather of kind than of degree. A mere concentration of power in those we consider strong, a distribution of it in those we look upon as weak. Victoria seems to me to have arrived at a power of concentrating herself upon whatever she undertakes, and that is the great secret of her success."

"I predict a great career for her," said the doctor; "her progress has been remarkable. She seems already to have gained an exhaustive knowledge of everything connected with the diseases of the eye, and is said to possess a dexterity of hand which leads one to hope she may be able to turn her knowledge to good account. No doubt but that little Madge's blindness has made her direct her attention especially to this subject."

"Do you think there is any possibility of the poor child regaining her sight?" asked Sir Francis.

"It is just possible," said the doctor. "I imagine, from what little knowledge I could gain from the state of her eyes when she was here, that she could not have been born blind, but that she must have become so in infancy. There have been one or two instances in which eyes in the state hers are have been operated on with the most extraordinary results. But success in such cases depends not only on the skill of the operator, which must be of the highest order, but upon the most watchful care and attention after the operation. A great deal depends, too, upon

the health of the patient. In the state of health caused by all the mental and physical suffering the poor child has undergone, success would be very questionable; but Victoria writes that Madge has very much improved of late, and that she is growing stronger daily. She could not be in better hands. I have quite made up my mind, if she ever gets her sight, it will be through Victoria."

"I saw the poor child when I was last at Zurich, and she was looking very happy," said Sir Francis; "and the power Victoria exercises over her is extraordinary."

"I wonder what relation the child is to her?" said the doctor, thoughtfully.

"Do you think that their names being alike is anything more than a coincidence?" asked Sir Francis.

"I cannot help doing so," said the doctor; "for, though in the letter which has had such a remarkable influence upon Victoria's life, her aunt confined herself to a relation of the sad aberrations of mind and conduct which seemed to have been for generations the fatal inheritance of so many members of her family, she most scrupulously avoided

every detail as to name or place which would have given the slightest clue to their identity. I have no reason to believe that the name she went by was not her real one, but twice I have been struck by a remarkable, though distorted, resemblance between a portrait which hung up in her room, but which at her express desire was destroyed shortly after her death, and the man whom I subsequently discovered to be little Madge's father."

"Have you ever mentioned this to Victoria?"

"No. There is a sort of tacit understanding between us that all subjects should be avoided which only produce painful feelings without any useful object. I know, too, that she would not love little Madge more, or take a greater interest in her, because she was a cousin. It is very possible, however, that she may have some suspicion with regard to it."

"Does anyone know what has become of Madge's wretched father?" asked Sir Francis.

"Nothing has been heard of him," said the doctor. "From his appearance and

character, I should think he would either drink himself to death, or, money failing him, die from want of the stimulants which have become a necessity of existence. Chub caused inquiries to be made, but could learn nothing."

"And how is Chub getting on?" asked Sir Francis.

"He will do well," said the doctor. "Chub may never set the Thames on fire, but he is a sensible, well-conducted young fellow; and his engagement to Eva, which is no longer a secret, has given him an object to work for, without which I fear his easy-going nature would soon have subsided into indolence. Chub is a dear good fellow, and will do very well by-and-by. Fill your glass, Sir Francis —the wine is good and sound, and not of the Hugh Forrester brand—here's a health to Chub!"

The mention of Eva's name had turned Sir Francis's thoughts in a new direction.

"Have you heard whether Davos has benefited Lady Runnymede?" he asked, with a simulated air of indifference.

"Victoria speaks very hopefully," said the

doctor; "she had only just returned from a short visit to her when she last wrote. The death of the child appears to have been a great blow to her. Then there are other circumstances. I fear she is unhappy, and of all diseases unhappiness is the most difficult to cure."

"Lord Runnymede is hunting at Dornton," said Sir Francis, drily.

"He is a brute!" said the doctor, who prided himself on being plain spoken, or, as he expressed it, on calling a spade a spade. "Chub has told me things of him which prove that he is unworthy of such a wife as Geraldine. At the very time she was so ill, he was constantly at the theatre, screening himself from observation behind one of the most notorious members of the demi-monde in London. He ought to be ashamed of himself!"

Sir Francis was silent. His indignation was far greater than the doctor's, but he did not dare trust himself to express it.

"Come, doctor," he said, "let us join the ladies."

In the drawing-room Mrs. Pringle sat, as

usual, in a state of silent satisfaction over her everlasting wool-work. She was more than usually happy, for the dinner had been well-cooked, and the gentlemen had shown that they had appreciated it. Indeed, the only time when Mrs. Pringle's usually placid temper could be said to be perturbed was on those days of the week when Sis, following the example and precept of the Rev. Aloysius, refused to eat anything but bread and butter, or eggs and vegetables.

"It is quite tiresome," Mrs. Pringle would say, "to be obliged to remember those horrid omelettes; and I am sick of seeing Sis and Aloysius"—with great difficulty she had arrived at calling her intended son-in-law Aloysius—"eating them. I am sure they cannot be wholesome, taken in such large quantities, and must injure their stomachs; indeed, I always observe that people who fast are inclined to pimples."

She had even thought it necessary to speak to her husband very seriously on the subject, but she was not at all satisfied with his reply.

"Pish! my dear, pish! If the poor

child thinks she will get to heaven the easier, through eating eggs, why, let her eat them."

"But they give pimples," objected Mrs. Pringle.

"Pish!" said the doctor; "they do nothing of the kind. Perhaps it would be better for us all if we eat less; but you have spoiled us with your good dinners."

Mrs. Pringle was mollified; her pride as a housekeeper was satisfied. If you wanted to win her heart, you had—as we know—only to praise her dinners.

It was, then, under the influence of an appreciated dinner, that, as the gentlemen entered the room, Mrs. Pringle sat placidly at her wool-work.

Sis and the Rev. Aloysius were sitting in a somewhat remote part of the room, rather closer together than ordinary mortals would have found convenient—Sis hard at work on some ecclesiastical pattern; she does nothing but what she calls "Church work" now—the Rev. Aloysius with hands clasped, head a little turned on one side, and an expression of the deepest, very deepest, interest, listening to her. For Sis loved to talk when she worked, and

loved more than all, to talk to her dear Aloysius, for he hung upon every word as if real pearls of wisdom were dropping from her lips. Poor dear Sis! she little knew that the apparently entranced listener was thinking more of those lips than of the words.

"Don't you think I am right?" she asked suddenly.

"Of course I do," said the Reverend Aloysius.

He declared he was perfectly of her opinion; though, truth to tell, he had not for the last five minutes heard a single syllable of what she had said. The hypocrite! he was thinking of those lips.

But Sis wanted something more than his assent—she wanted his views; and it was just as the position of the Rev. Aloysius was becoming very embarrassing, that the door opened, and Dr. Pringle and Sir Francis walked in.

Then it was that the Rev. Aloysius and Sis had simultaneously drawn back their chairs, and assumed a more distant manner towards each other.

Mrs. Pringle presided at the tea-table;

and in a short time the doctor and Sir Francis sat down to chess, and the silence was only broken by the low murmur of the conversation between the two lovers. From the few stray words which were occasionally audible, it was evident they had returned to the one topic which seemed to exclude all others, and that they were talking "Church."

Poor little Sis! it was astonishing how glibly she spoke about chasubles, reredoses, and birettas; and what a depth of interest she showed when the Rev. Aloysius dwelt upon the marvels of what he had seen at Ober-Ammergau, and on the intensity of the emotion they had produced in him; then they became critical, and after skirmishing a little with Church-music, proceeded to a fierce onslaught on heartless services and Calvinistic preachers; descending step by step from generalities to personalities; and then Sis was in her element, for though she hated being ridiculed herself, she had a keen sense of the ridiculous in others, and always had some little phrase ready with which to point her satire.

She was describing an old gentleman who had preached the Sunday before in the parish church :

"It really was quite dreadful to be obliged to listen to him," she said, "he had such an absurd voice. He did not speak—he quacked like a duck!"

She was so pleased with the idea that she spoke a little louder than usual, and her father heard her remark.

"Sis, Sis!" he said, "better far to quack out sense like a duck, than talk nonsense like a goose!"

Sis made no answer; but she and the Rev. Aloysius exchanged glances full of pity for the speaker—at least the glances began with pity—but being continued a little too long, ended in such an evident expression of love on the part of the impressionable Aloysius, that Sis, unable to sustain it, looked down and blushed.

The game between the doctor and Sir Francis was a very close one. The doctor had just said "Check to the king," and was rubbing his hands—a habit of his when he was pleased—at the prospect of victory, when

the sound of wheels was heard, and a carriage drove rapidly up to the house.

"Confound it!" said the doctor—it was the worst language he was ever known to use. "Confound it! How true it is, that there is no peace for the wicked."

Under ordinary circumstances Sis would have said: "But you are not wicked, papa;" now, however, she sat silent, for she had not yet digested having been called a "goose."

"A carriage, sir, from Dornton," said the servant, entering the room. "You are wanted there immediately."

"Who is ill?" asked the doctor.

"I do not quite know, sir," said the servant; "but they had a good run, and the marquis has not returned. It is thought there must have been an accident. They are getting anxious at the house, and have sent out in all directions."

"What was the line of country?" asked Sir Francis of the groom who had come with the carriage.

"They found in the dingle, and ran the fox through Hangman's Wood, past Bruton

hill, and killed him in the open, on Strattonsfield Downs."

"When was Lord Runnymede last seen?"

"He was well up to nearly the last; but no one seems to know what became of him."

"And his horse?"

"Has not been seen."

"Tell Hawkins to bring up the dogcart," said Sir Francis. "I will make a circuit in the direction he must have taken, and call in at Dornton on my way back. His horse must have met with an accident, and he may have been obliged to take shelter from the rain in one of the houses on Springset Common. I will drive there and see."

"Do so," said the doctor. "I will, at all events, wait for you at Dornton; I dare say it is a false alarm. Oh, who would be a doctor? My old luck! I am always called out in bad weather."

To the ladies' expressions of anxiety he had no other answer than:

"Pish! It is nothing."

CHAPTER VII.

A DAY WITH THE HOUNDS.

THE earlier part of the day, which had closed at Deepdale as described in the last chapter, had been fine, with that southerly wind and cloudy sky which is said to "proclaim a hunting morning."

The new owner of Dornton, who had only lately come to reside there—for his predecessor had preferred living on another property in a southern county—was a keen sportsman.

On the death of Mr. Yorke he had taken over the hounds, and at the present time it was the great object of his life to establish their character on such a footing that a run with the "Middleshire" might be looked upon as an object of ambition for all men—aye,

and for all women—who love to ride straight; and it was with a flush of pleasure upon his rubicund face, that, after a good day, he would be heard to say :

"Gad, sir, a few more runs like this, and next year we shall have the Empress !"

There was a hunt breakfast at Dornton, for the meet was at the village, not a mile off, and many horses, perfect pictures of what horses should be, were being led up and down before the house, so full of life and eagerness, that it was difficult to hold them, as they capered or plunged, or turned their heads, with pointed ears and expectant eyes, in the direction of their riders. For the hounds were near, and they were anxious to be off.

They had not long to wait, for exactly as the bell of the stable-clock sounded the first stroke of the hour, the doors were thrown open, and a crowd of men in red and green and black coats streamed out upon the lawn. Men of all ages and of various types; united by a common object, and looking as if, for this day at least, this was a world in which there was no such thing as care; for the master of Dornton had predicted a sure find,

and with such a wind and such a sky a good run was certain.

A motley group, in which many of the classes of English life were well represented: the tall, wiry, weather-beaten country squire, who never missed a day, and whose chief occupation in winter, when not shooting, was following the hounds; the burly, jovial-looking farmer, who was supposed to have made a "pot" of money, though he was always declaring that it was impossible to farm excepting at a loss; the sharp-featured lawyer from the neighbouring town on a useful hack; the country banker, on his weight-carrying cob; the young guardsman, so exquisitely turned out that it seemed quite a pity he should get splashed; the soberly-dressed rector, who did not profess to hunt, but who liked horse exercise, and could not be made to see that any particular sin was to be associated with horses and hounds; the boy fresh from Eton, determined to be stopped by nothing over which his pony could carry him; ladies, guests at Dornton, of various ages, sizes, and weights, but unanimous in giving a practical demonstra-

tion of the principle that no woman should mount a horse who is not prepared to show her shape; ladies who rode with such grace that it was a pleasure to look at them, a pleasure which in some cases was somewhat marred by the feeling of insecurity awakened by the smallness of their waists, and the painful ideas connected with the anatomical derangements connected with them.

But this is a mere man's idea, and men cannot be supposed to know anything about such matters.

There was mounting in hot haste. The young ladies somewhat embarrassed by the number of aspirants for the honour of helping them into their saddles; the older ones quietly availing themselves of the assistance of their husbands or their grooms.

Most of the party had mounted and moved off when two or three laggards lounged slowly from the house. One of them was the Marquis of Runnymede. He was unchanged. The same easy, self-satisfied manner, the same well-bred way of doing small things, the same good taste in the choice of a tailor which had been commented on by

Geraldine. An air of deliberation in all he did, not even departed from when he mounted the splendid, high-spirited chestnut, whose anxiety to be off would have made it a matter of no small difficulty for a less practised horseman.

There could be no doubt that my lord was a fine-looking fellow with an aristocratic bearing, and that he sat a horse as none but the best of English riders can; his easy *insouciance* became him, and as he now appeared, it was almost impossible to believe that during the short space of time he had been a husband he had succeeded in making his wife utterly wretched.

Lord Runnymede was in "pink," but a piece of black cloth round his left arm told the world that he was in mourning; without this it is doubtful whether the world would have discovered it, for there was very little about my lord's manner to show that a short time had elapsed since he had lost a child.

"A mere baby, you know; but of course Lady Runnymede feels it very much."

In speaking of the child's death to his friends he always seemed to make it an affair

in which he could not be expected to have more than a very remote interest. He had too many other important things to think of.

Now he was in his element. No man sat a horse better, not even the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps or Major Fitz Jones—also guests at Dornton—who rode by his side.

Three men who had made horses and dogs the study of their lives. Who knew how best to use them, so that with the sagacity of the one and the speed of the other they might end a gallop across country with a whoop of victory, and return home in triumph with a fox's brush.

Three men who considered that the fox's place in nature was to afford them sport, and who, though still in the prime of life, had no other means of refreshing their jaded lives than varying their amusements.

To a thinking fox man must be a perplexing puzzle. A thinking man would probably find a marvellous revolution in his ideas could he but find himself for a short time in the fox's place. But perhaps foxes don't think. It is quite certain that a great many men

don't; they only make use of other people's ideas, and fancy they are their own. With more thinking it is possible there would be fewer foxes. Would the world be benefited by this or not? It is evident the race of fox-hunters might become extinct; but who can say what the consequences of that might be?

But Lord Runnymede thinks not of all this. Happy Lord Runnymede! A black band round his arm, but no sorrow. A beautiful young wife, sick and sad, seeking health in a strange land—but no care. Debts, and difficulties, and strange entanglements looming in the distance—but a light heart.

To have heard his cheerful laugh, as they rode along, at the ponderous unfinished jokes of FitzJones, or the poor bits of gossip retailed with poorer attempts at sarcasm by the Hon. P. P., it might have been thought that he who laughed so gaily, rode so easily, and looked out upon the world with such a pleasant countenance, was a man to be envied. And he was evidently popular, for on joining the main body of the hunt—assembled on the

village green—next to the owner of Dornton no man was more warmly greeted.

Many families from the neighbourhood had driven over to see the meet, and mothers pointed him out to their daughters, and felt proud when they saw their sons speaking to him. Of course, now, he no longer excited any interest as the best match in England. But he was still the heir to a dukedom; and as the husband of Geraldine Yorke he was an evidence of what a commoner's daughter might aspire to, provided she were rich, though that was a proviso fond mothers often overlooked.

"What a splendid day!"

"We are to commence with the Dingle, and Tom Smith, who knows every fox in the country, says we are sure to find."

"By George! if my lord's horse is as good as he looks, it will take a rasper to stop him."

"Too long in the back to please me!"

"Yes, but he has not to carry the weight you put on your cob."

"I'll back the cob against my lord's chestnut for a pony."

"Come! they are moving off, and it won't take long to draw the Dingle."

Tom Smith was right; a fox, and a fox of the right sort, was soon viewed in the open.

"There he goes! There he goes!"

Then the dogs were to be seen running, so that, according to the same authority, they might have been covered with a sheet, followed by a tolerably compact mass of horsemen; whilst a *pater familias* and his boys make for some well-known gap, and some veteran "craner," on a hack that objects to fencing even more than his master, rides off at right angles by some lane, which will probably, in the end, give him a good place.

Men and women, and horses and hounds, are in great spirits. They seem actuated by a common feeling. There is nothing like a community of interests for producing harmony out of the most opposite elements.

"What a glorious day!"

"What splendid exercise!"

"What capital fun!"

"Yes, my good boy! capital fun for everybody but the fox."

He, poor fellow, does not appear to appre-

ciate it, and falls dreadfully in the estimation of his pursuers when he doubles round, and leaving the Dingle behind him, takes refuge in the broad covers of the Hangman's Wood.

"What a shame!"

"What a brute!"

"And such a day for scent."

But the dogs are on his track, and run him three times round the cover before he breaks —bursting out just at the very point where no one expected him, so that he is away and the dogs after him with no one but the whips and old Jack Podgers, who is always to the fore, and it takes much hard riding for the master and the favoured few who have good horses and know how to ride them to recover their lost ground. The rest of the field gallop along in a desultory kind of way, and resolve themselves at last in a scattering of coloured spots about the landscape, moving at various rates in different directions.

From the top of Bruton Ridge the hounds can still be seen, reduced to a moving patch; so small that a pocket-handkerchief could now cover it; followed by a little—a very little—cluster of red and black dots. Some

of the knowing ones pretend to be able to see the fox; but the majority of the spectators are disposed to accept the fact of his presence on faith.

"Forward! Forward!"

The scent gets stronger, and the dogs move at a pace which on the down-sloping grass-land they are now passing over, requires from the few horsemen who are following them an almost racing speed.

Besides the whips but six men and a young lady who is a first-rate rider, and is known throughout the county as "Jos," are now with the hounds. The young lady, thanks to her light weight, is first, then a stranger in a black coat; next comes Jack Podgers, whose horse has been saved by numerous short cuts and his rider's knowledge of the country, and close after him, neck and neck, Major FitzJones and Lord Runnymede, with the chestnut beginning to show signs of distress; then comes the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps, cursing his horse, and at some little distance the owner of Dornton, cursing his weight, for this is to be the run of the season, and there is a heavy bit of country before them.

"Forward! Forward!"

A broad belt of plantation lies in the bottom right ahead; the hounds have swarmed over the broad ditch and fence which skirts it, and their joyous cry, as, after a few moments' hesitation, they followed one of the drives by which it was intersected, showed that the fox had either lost his head or considered it did not afford suitable cover for his concealment.

As they neared the plantation, the horsemen formed into two diverging lines. On the left, the whips, Jos, the black-coated stranger, FitzJones, and Lord Runnymede made for a gap in the fence. On the right, the Hon. P. P. and the Master followed Jack Podgers to a somewhat more distant gate, which that experienced gentleman declared to be open. For those who knew Jack Podgers and wanted to save their horses, always followed him if they could.

The whips scramble rather than jump over the ditch and disappear through the gap; Jos, FitzJones, and the stranger follow; the chestnut, full of impatience, makes a laboured rush —so close to the horse before him, that he

swerves in the jump, and a projecting branch sweeps his rider from the saddle—Lord Runnymede has had a heavy fall, but the ground is soft and he rises unhurt, but the chestnut has galloped on and is already out of sight.

All but Lord Runnymede were now galloping through the plantation, the black-coated stranger being last, for he had mistaken his way and turned up a wrong drive. He had not got far, when the riderless chestnut came up, and thinking to do its owner a good turn, he caught it by the bridle, and hooked the reins in the branch of a tree. When he had gained the opposite side of the plantation the hounds were far ahead; so after riding over a couple of fields and coming to a road which led him to the nearest railway station where he could hope to get a horse-box, he too tailed off.

Lord Runnymede, in anything but a pleasant mood, toiled through the wood by the drive which had been followed by the rest of the riders; on emerging from it he could see nothing of his horse, and there was not a living soul in sight. During the excitement of the run he had not observed that dark,

threatening clouds had been for some time rising in the west; now it was evident the day was about to change to wet, and there was no cover near. He knew he must be a long way from Dornton, and he had no notion in what direction he ought to turn his steps.

The first thing to be done was to find a road, and this he knew he should do by making his way towards the different gates; but walking over ploughed fields is slow work, and by the time he had found a path, which brought him out upon a muddy country lane, the afternoon was well advanced, and the rain had come down in torrents.

Trudge, trudge — tramp, tramp — splash, splash.

He threw away the end of his cigar and lighted another. He threw it away angrily, threw it away as if it had had something to do with his misfortune.

He should not have cared if Phipps and FitzJones had not been there. How they would laugh over it at the club—"Runnymede came to grief at a ditch a child could have leaped over." Nobody would believe

the story of the projecting branch. It was enough to make a saint swear.

That cursed chestnut! Then from the chestnut he thought over all the horses he had ever hunted: their names, their colours, their prices, their paces, their qualities. From his own horses, his thoughts carried him to those of his friends—to the horse ridden by the man in the black coat—the horse which had made his swerve. Curse the brute!

But the wet was penetrating his boots—they were new—the ones he had had last from Stinton; he should never be able to wear them again; he must send for others; he must write to Stinton—the best maker of boots in town, Stinton—of men's boots; and from men's boots his thoughts turned to ladies' boots—to a little foot, and from a little foot, to a fair girl from whom he had received a note that morning, beginning "My deer runnie," written in a bad, bold hand.

He had no place in his thoughts for his suffering young wife or his dead child.

The heavy rain had driven the labourers from the fields, and he must have walked

nearly an hour without having seen a house, or met anyone from whom he could inquire his way, when the lane suddenly opened out upon a wide common, on the further side of which he could just see a few scattered houses, and right before him, on the main road leading from them, the figure of a man. He had scarcely reduced the distance between them a few paces, when he felt sure he recognised, in the drenched, shabby, wild-looking wretch who staggered towards him, some one whom he had seen before. In another moment his doubts were at an end; it was his old acquaintance, the owner of Fortuna, the defaulter on the Turf—Mr. Marsh.

There was no mistaking the tall, strongly-knit figure, the bloated—but once handsome—face. It was John Marsh. John Marsh, made even more repulsive by his long neglected hair and beard, and the ragged squalor which had taken the place of his former dressy swagger. He would have passed him by if he could, but he could not; for John Marsh, with outstretched arms and a brandished stick in his right hand, placed himself in his path close before him.

"Stop, devil!" he said, "I have you now, one of the devils I have so often seen before, but never could catch, a painted devil—a red devil. Ha, ha!"

He burst into a long hoarse laugh; he was either very drunk, or mad.

"My good fellow, let me pass," said Lord Runnymede. "It is not pleasant in the rain, you know, and I am in a hurry."

"Not pleasant in the rain!" echoed the other. "I love the rain, it cools the blood. It is good for you, devil, to be out in the rain. You shall not go, devil; we will sit here and talk it over—here on that stone, till midnight; then we will curse the world together, devil, and I will kill you!"

He must be mad—dangerously mad. Lord Runnymede made a step forward and tried to pass him; but he was seized in a grasp which made him feel powerless.

"Feel my arm, devil," he said; "with that arm I could destroy ten thousand with a blow. How can a poor weak thing like you escape?"

Then he rambled off to horses and the odds, and as he talked he became even more excited than before.

"Red devil," he exclaimed, "you are a welsher and a cheat! Why do you grin out at me like that scoundrel Runnymede, who, because he was a lord, must needs win? Devil, devil, devil, devil! pay me back my money!" he was foaming with passion and his voice had become a scream.

"I have no money with me," said Lord Runnymede, vainly endeavouring to pacify him, for such was the strength and fury of the madman that he had become seriously alarmed.

"You lie, red devil—you lie!" he answered.

Lord Runnymede struggled to get free, but in vain; his antagonist, with a strength which seemed superhuman, swung him from his feet and cast him to the ground. Then, striking fiercely at him with his stick, fled from him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed. "He is dead; the devil is dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

His laugh might have been heard less and less, and rapidly less, as he ran swiftly off and was lost to sight in the gloaming.

On the road an inert red mass.

Hours passed away, still it was there. Day turned into dusk, and dusk to night; but the mass remained, looming out through the darkness, without colour now, a mere shapeless shadowy something, lying in that lonely spot.

But one blow with a stick from a madman's hand—but one blow! But the muscles of a strong arm, obeying the directing impulse of a frenzied brain, and the swift current of life is arrested in its course, and the spirit which belongs to it flees and hides away as if in fear of the approach of death.

Many hours had passed, and it must have been eleven o'clock, when the silence was broken by the sound of wheels, and lights drew near the spot where that dark mass lay.

It was the dog-cart, with Sir Francis Hawthorn and a groom in waterproof suits, which reflected upon their wet shiny surfaces the scattered light from the two side-lamps.

Suddenly the horse shied, and at the same moment the light from one of the lamps streamed full upon a dark object lying almost in the centre of the road.

"Jump down, Hawkins," said Sir Francis,

as he drew up by the roadside. "Jump down and see what it is."

But before the man had time to do so—whether he had recognised the prostrate figure before him, or whether he simply gave expression to his fears, it is hard to say—Sir Francis exclaimed :

"Good heavens, it must be Lord Runnymede! Take the reins."

He jumped down as he spoke, and in another moment was supporting the apparently lifeless form of Lord Runnymede in his arms.

"Thank God, he is still alive!" he said, as he placed his hand upon his heart. "Drive to the village for help and a stretcher, and then to Dornton for Dr. Pringle."

CHAPTER VIII.

"OH, THAT I COULD BUT SEE!"

NATURE has garbed herself in snow. Everywhere, as far as the eye can reach, nothing but snow.

Thick in the valleys, deep upon the surface of the frozen lake, glistening in the sunshine on the mountain tops, sprinkled over steep slopes, powdered on the pine-trees—everywhere, as far as the eye can reach, nothing but snow.

The air is so pure, there is such an all-pervading stillness, the sun shines down from out a sky of such deep and brilliant blue that it seems as if it were a region in which cares and vulgar mundane thoughts could have no place. As if it were a region in which the mind would become lifted up, steep by steep,

until it lost itself in the contemplation of those everlasting and eternal heights which stand too high for man's feeble vision, and of that purity of which the snow spread out before us in all its dazzling whiteness is but a poor emblem.

Yet, even in such a region as this, cares and vulgar mundane thoughts must be.

As if to prove it, amidst this snow, on the beaten track on one side of the valley leading to Davos, were three dark figures—two ladies and a child, dressed in deep mourning.

The tallest of the two ladies, who, but for her pale face and sunken eyes, would have seemed the one to whom nature had given the most strength—her figure was so erect, and her step so firm—walked alone. Not many steps from her came the child, leaning, almost too heavily it seemed, in a clinging kind of way, upon the arm of her slight and frail-looking companion.

On coming nearer to them, it might have been seen that the lady who walked alone wore weeds, and that the child who clung to her companion's arm was blind.

It was Lady Runnymede, with Eva and Madge.

Lady Runnymede had been some months at Davos—for Davos had suggested itself to the doctors, when they found she resisted their remedies, and that, apart from the effects of grief for the loss of her sickly child, they could discover no reason for her being ill—when the intelligence reached her of her husband's death.

The intelligence had been broken to her by Victoria, to whom it had been communicated by Sir Francis.

What strange irony of fate that it was he who was to find the senseless form of the man who had robbed him of the one who had become the being most dear to him on earth—that it was upon him that was to devolve all the care of that poor unconscious form during the few days that the flame of life burnt slowly out, and flickered away into the dark silence of death—and that it was from him, through one so dear to both, that Geraldine should learn that she was free—that she was no longer the slave of a man she had despised, but whom she now wept over with bitter tears;

for grief has but small memory for past injuries, and he, who had died so sadly and so mysteriously—for none could quite make out how the injury had been received—had been her husband and the father of her dead child. Now that he was dead, she did more than forgive him—she blamed herself. Had she been the right kind of wife for him? If she had acted differently towards him, might he not have been better?

Victoria made no attempt to combat these feelings; she knew that time—time, the silent and inscrutable—is the best and surest earthly alleviator of sorrow. But she wrote to Eva, and said:

"Your place now is at Davos. You are needed there; and I am sure Lady Arabella will spare you."

"Ah me!" said Lady Arabella. "It is just like Victoria. She never had any real sympathy for me. Nobody has any sympathy for me! But you had better go, child."

And so Eva went.

But it struck Victoria that some outside interest was wanted, to stand between

Geraldine and the morbid state of mind into which she had fallen; and so she bethought herself of Madge.

She put it as an act of kindness towards Madge. Madge wanted change. Madge wanted bracing; the possibility of restoring her sight—and it was allowed to be possible—depended on her constitution being strengthened, upon her nervous energy being raised to a strong and healthy tone. Would Geraldine help her in this? For until she had taken her degree, she herself could not leave Zurich. Davos was the very place for the dear child, the very climate she required; and she would be within reach.

Geraldine had said "Yes;" and so it was that those three dark figures were to be seen walking over the beaten snowy track between Davos-Platz and Dörfli.

Madge looked bright and happy: the fresh air and a brisk walk had flushed her cheek, and as she hung on Eva's arm she talked rapidly and earnestly:

"Only think, here I am with the dear little 'Somebody' of whom I used to hear so

much. Oh, how I wish Mr. Pringle was with us! Don't you, dear 'Somebody?'"

Eva, quiet and gentle as ever, blushing at the mention of Chub's name, can only reply incoherently:

"Oh yes, he would I am sure like Davos very much; and—— But, Madge, you must really walk quietly, and not jump about so!"

Madge, too, was in mourning—deep mourning. She had been told that her father was dead. But there was no mourning in her heart.

"Is it true?" she had asked the next morning of Victoria; "or did I dream it?"

When told that it was true, and that she had not dreamt it, she was silent for a few seconds; then she said, with a deep sigh:

"Dead!"

The sigh seemed to have taken a great load off her heart, for her face from that moment became less sad. From that time, too, she had never alluded to the subject. But it was observed that henceforward she scrupulously avoided, even when speaking of others, the word "Father."

She had not been told the manner of his death. Victoria had not thought it right to enter into any particulars. She herself had learned from Dr. Pringle that, within a week of Lord Runnymede's death, he had, in the absence of the parish doctor, been called in to what turned out to be the death-bed of a pauper, who had been admitted some days before in a state of either insanity or delirium tremens.

He had been unable to give any account of himself, but remained under the impression that he was being tormented by a red devil, to the very last. The only clue to his identity, was a partly obliterated name, "J. Ms . . . ." in the lining of a torn and battered hat. Inquiries were made, but they had led to no result.

"I might have told them, had I chosen to do so, which I did not, what I now tell you, and wish no one else to know—do not forget this wish—that the wretched man before me was your cousin, the scapegrace son of your poor aunt's letter, for I recognised in him the man I had seen coming out of Mr. Yorke's study; and in the repose of death, the re-

semblance to the portrait in your aunt's room was unmistakable."

Again, was it through that which men call chance? or was it in accordance with a providential design, that this poor child, this cousin, this sharer with herself in an inheritance of sin and shame, had been brought into her arms?

No, it could not be chance.

But ought she not to tell her? She consulted Dr. Pringle, and he repeated his wish that the knowledge he had imparted to her—and to her alone—should remain a secret between them. "Madge could not love you more than she does at present; I cannot see that anything would be gained by directing her attention to the painful scenes connected with the past. When her mind is developed and her character formed, you may exercise your discretion, but now I would most strongly advise you—in the poor child's best interests—not to do so."

So it was that Madge only knew that her father was dead; and she turned her face with less sadness and increasing love towards the only being who had ever acted towards her as a mother, for she who was dead had but wept

over her, and her tears had brought neither reverence nor love—nothing but a shuddering pity.

"Tell me about the snow," Madge said as they walked along; "dear little 'Somebody,' do talk to me about the snow."

She was never tired of hearing about the snow. Even Lady Runnymede—for Madge had never dared to call her anything else—must talk to her about the snow.

She wished to know all about it. Why it fell always, always, instead of rain, on the upper mountains? Why it would not turn into ice when it was very, very high up? Why they could not walk upon it now that the winter was so cold, and would have to wait until the weather was warmer before they could do so? All this, and much more in endless questions she must know. Even Geraldine was drawn from within herself, and had often to come to Eva's aid when the child's questions went beyond her knowledge.

"You must wait until Victoria comes," said Eva, fairly beaten at last; "she will be able to tell you."

"Oh yes! dear auntie knows everything," said the child, as if it were quite natural she should do so. "And she is always learning. I am sure if I only knew one half, or one quarter, what she does, I would never learn any more."

"Oh you little dunce!" said Geraldine, who had become amused, despite herself, with the child's prattle. "What would Victoria say if she heard you?"

"Do you know, Lady Runnymede," said the child, putting on a solemn serious air, "that auntie is learning all about eyes; why some people can see, and other people, like my poor self, can't?"

"How do you know she is learning about eyes?" asked Eva.

"Because she once talked to Dr. Pringle about mine; and just before I came here, a gentleman came and looked at my eyes, and made them open very wide, and used a great many hard words that I could not understand; and then auntie asked him if his opinion agreed with hers, and he said, 'It is just possible, but we must wait.' Oh dear, dear little 'Somebody,' what did he mean by 'just

possible'? Tell me, tell me. I dare not ask auntie, for she does not like me to ask about what people talk about; and you must not tell her what I have said—please Lady Runnymede don't say one single word about what I have said. Oh, that I could but see!"

There was a touching pathos about the last words which brought tears into the eyes of the two sisters, but they did not speak, and for a few minutes they walked on in silence.

The child was the first to break it. She spoke as if to herself:

"How beautiful it must be! But what can it be like—this snow, this cold snow that melts in my hands; and the ice that is colder still? Are all cold things white? and what can white be like? Oh! sometimes my poor head aches and swims when I think of these colours, and try to make out what people mean when they talk of things looking pretty, and lovely, and beautiful. Yet I know that flowers must be lovely, for they are sweet and soft, and grow from little buds into great big blossoms; and I love soft

voices and kind words, and I know when the dear lips which speak them meet mine, that they, too, must be lovely. And most beautiful of all, those I love. Oh, if I could but see my dear Victoria, and Mr. Pringle, and you, my dear little 'Somebody,' and Lady Runnymede; but most of all, my own dear auntie, my Victoria!"

Why was it that she whom Madge loved best, and thought of as the ideal of all that was beautiful, should have been the one who had done most to prepare herself for the hard work and stern realities of life; and who had least accepted, the world's definition of a woman's mission?

Why was it?

Is the answer so difficult to find?

Was it not that whilst Geraldine pondered over the poor blind child's questions, and Eva answered them out of the shallow depths of her own sweet consciousness, Victoria spoke with all the force and authority which belongs to deep convictions based on knowledge; for let fools scoff if they will, knowledge *is* a power, and it is he who unites a strong mind to a soft heart who is best able

to lend a helping hand to the feeble and the frail. For the weak love those best who can give them that which they want most—strength.

It was this power that caused equally the disappointed lover, the bereaved wife and mother, and the saddened and afflicted child, to seek for consolation and comfort from Victoria.

Yet it would have seemed more natural, at least in Geraldine's case, that the companionship of that sister for whom she had such a deep love would have been her chief solace; but to be with Eva, sweet as it was to her, brought weakness instead of strength; it was as the perfume of flowers in the sick-chamber, bringing for the moment a flush of pleasure to some poor sufferer's cheek, to be followed by a deeper pallor than before.

Then, too, Geraldine had not been pleased with Eva for having bestowed her love on Chub. She was very fond of Chub; still some of the old leaven remained, just enough to make her feel angry with herself for possessing it; but the lessons of a life cannot

be unlearnt in a moment. She overlooked Chub's many good qualities, whilst lamenting his want of what she would have once called "good form;" now she would have been ashamed of such a phrase, but some such idea, clothed in somewhat different words, had remained to torment her, and Victoria was the only person whose influence had overcome it.

But the necessity of being reconciled to an idea which had once been distasteful to her, had produced the effect of casting a shade, an almost imperceptible shade, over the great love which she still felt for Eva.

As for her mother, Geraldine might disguise it to herself, but the fact still remained, she was a nonentity. As far as she was concerned, she might as well have been without a mother. She could not recall a single instance of her mother's having exerted the smallest useful influence over her. She sometimes doubted whether her mother had any feelings of affection—indeed, she would not have doubted at all on the subject, had it not been that she seemed to cling to Duke, despite his miserable conduct, and divided

her attention between her own real and imaginary trials and his.

Perhaps the great bond of union between Lady Arabella and Duke was that, of all her children, he was the one who most resembled her. He had her refined tastes; her intense selfishness. She had sought her chief pleasure in a round of frivolous excitements, and he had done the same; for what is gambling but frivolity in its most exciting form?

He, too, was in a state of perpetual apprehension about his health, and this was one of the reasons why he found it necessary that he should remain in the only climate which appeared to suit him—that part of the Riviera which is within easy reach of Monte Carlo. It was on his account that his mother had been persuaded to take up her residence during the greater part of the year at Nice, and it was out of the funds with which she supplied him that he was enabled to seek those distractions which, according to Lady Arabella, "in the poor dear fellow's present state of health, are absolutely essential to him."

It can easily be imagined how delighted

Eva was to find herself once more with Geraldine, and the presence of Madge was an additional source of pleasure, for when they were alone together, Madge would talk to her of Chub, and it was so nice to hear the poor child say how deeply she loved him. Yes! she liked to hear Madge say that she loved Chub, for "it was only little Madge."

But Eva had a secret cause of great anxiety to her — that secret, that knowledge, so scrupulously kept to herself, of the parentage of Victoria. It weighed heavily upon her. Why should it be kept from Geraldine? At last, weary of her importunity, Victoria had to give way; Geraldine should know it, when she had quite recovered from all she had gone through, and with this promise Eva was obliged to be content.

And during all this time, she who had become the centre of so much individual action worked on persistently and steadily. Her personality had become so secondary to the great questions with which her mind was occupied; her own interests now seemed so small in comparison with the ends she had in view, that she was almost inclined to smile

when she thought upon the time when her misery or her happiness was made to depend upon the state of her feelings. Emotions which were thoroughly under control could not produce morbid thoughts, and the calmness which she had sought and obtained gave a fourfold force to a strong and well-directed will. She had been astonished to find how rapidly her power of acquiring knowledge had increased, and how easy much had become that she had once found so difficult. Her interest, too, in her studies became, as they approached their term, deeper and deeper. Her love for Madge had become intense : she had long suspected their relationship, and now that her suspicions had been confirmed, she could not help asking herself whether it might not be in the designs of the great Inscrutable Regulator of human actions to select her as the humble instrument through which the heavy affliction placed on the poor child might be removed? Oh, if she could but restore her to sight!

The greatest authority on the diseases of the eye in the university, a man with a European reputation, had pronounced an

opinion that a successful operation was just possible, provided that Madge's health at the time was in the best condition, and that all the details of after-treatment were watched with the most minute attention.

"In such a case," he said, "the operation is simply one of the factors of cure; the slightest subsequent imprudence, before the eye has obtained sufficient power to perform its new functions, would render her again blind—and hopelessly blind, for ever. Were I to undertake it, I should probably fail, for it would be a case requiring my whole care and attention for some uncertain period; and situated as I am, it would be impossible for me to give it. But with you, my dear young lady, it would be different; and I see no reason, considering the great, very great progress you have made, why you may not look forward, at no very far-distant date, to succeed where I should probably fail, and I shall be proud of my pupil."

Was it possible for any man or woman to have a higher aim?

Could it be true that she was on the point of obtaining the power which would enable

her to give sight to the poor blind Madge—the child upon whom she had concentrated all her love?

She dared not think of it; but as she worked steadily on and on, it was ever before her.

"To restore sight to the blind! O God! let me pray Thee to strengthen my weak efforts to obtain this great power. To restore sight to my darling! O God! I thank Thee for having put it into my heart."

And so she works, works on. Is working now, at this very time when Madge, arm-in-arm with the two sisters—for she has insisted upon walking between them—talks, and almost skips as she does so, of her dear Victoria, or mourns with drooping head and lagging pace her sad fate in not being able to see the snow.

"Oh, why did not God give me eyes like other people?"

What could Geraldine or Eva say to comfort her? They could but turn her attention to some other subject, and soothe her with kind words.

But the dark, dark cloud remained. They saw not what Victoria saw, the bright blue sky behind it. They knew not, as Victoria was learning to know, how to roll back that cloud of darkness and say, "Let there be light."

CHAPTER IX.

"AND THERE WAS LIGHT."

"WILL it hurt me very much, dear auntie?"

Nearly two years have elapsed since the walk described in the last chapter and this question.

Two years in which nothing very startling had happened in the lives of those in whom we have been interesting ourselves, but yet in which much had been done, and in which much silent preparation had been made, unobserved and may be often unheeded, for events that were about to form fresh starting-points in those seemingly uneventful lives.

Lady Arabella and Marmaduke Yorke had remained true to the Riviera, with a trip to the German baths during the summer months. Lady Runnymede and Eva had taken up their

home in Switzerland. Chub had passed his examinations, and was now going through a sort of intermediate process as medical officer of an emigrant ship bound to New Zealand. On his return he was to enter into partnership with his father, and to marry Eva; and then, and not before, was the Rev. Aloysius to be blessed with the hand of Sis. The Rev. Aloysius and Sis would have wished an earlier union, but it was a whim of the doctor's; he would have it that his children should be married on the same day. Of course his wife thought as he did, so the young people had to give in.

Sir Francis was at Hawthornedene, and Mr. Mortimer, much exercised by romantic feelings towards Mary, had taken service with him.

Sir Francis had wanted a butler, and Mr. Mortimer, as he was never tired of telling his friends, had felt bound to help him out of his "hembarrassment." He did not tell them that he was starving at the time, and that Sir Francis had rescued him from the most abject misery.

Sir Francis himself was now frequently

from home, for when not attending to his parliamentary duties, he spent much of his time in Switzerland, for he had become an enthusiastic mountain-climber and an energetic member of the Alpine Club.

Madge had remained in the loving care of Geraldine and Eva, a source of the deepest interest to both.

Her improvement had been extraordinary.

"Now I know, she would say, "what it is to live. I can scarcely believe it is still the same poor little *me*. Oh that I could but see those whom I so dearly love! Will the time never come when dear auntie will have learned how to give me sight?"

She said this because she knew—for the child, in accordance with Victoria's expressed wish, was kept fully informed of all that was going on around her—that Victoria had finished her studies and had become a doctor, and was now devoting herself to obtaining a more practical knowledge of the diseases of the eye in the Ophthalmic Hospital at Berne.

It was now indeed some months since Victoria had taken her diploma and received

the highest encomiums which could be paid a student, from the heads of the University. The paper she had read on the occasion, upon the eye and its diseases, had excited universal attention; and she had been warmly congratulated on her success by many of the professors, and more than all by the generous and warm-hearted man, who had gained the reputation of being the greatest authority on the treatment of the eye, in Europe.

Victoria had again consulted him on Madge's case, and pressed him to undertake it; but he had repeated that though he had still no doubt a cure could be effected, it would probably require a series of operations, and a degree of after attention utterly beyond the power of anyone unable to give up a very large amount of his time to her particular case.

"For me to attempt it," he had added, "would be therefore quite out of the question; but with your knowledge and extraordinary aptitude for operations requiring delicate manipulation, I see no reason why you should not undertake it. Your chance of success would be much greater than mine; and restor-

ing sight to the poor child would be a reward far in excess of anything the University can offer, even to its most deserving student."

Day by day her confidence in herself was increasing. She felt that the time was fast approaching when she might make the attempt, and so she had prepared Madge for it by, from time to time, explaining to her what she had in view; and it was on one of these occasions that the child had asked her:

"Will it hurt me very much, dear auntie?"

She pursed her little mouth up as she said so—for Madge, like all children of a delicate organisation, was very sensitive to pain—and there was a little quiver in her voice which did not escape Victoria's notice.

"Hurt you? Of course it will hurt you, and that is the one disagreeable thing that we doctors have to put up with; we are often obliged to give people pain in order to cure them."

"Yes, but then you cure them. Oh, auntie dear, what a pleasure that must be! You must not mind hurting me, I shall not care

for it one bit; and do you know, auntie," she said as she nestled closer to her, "I love you so much that I don't think you could hurt me. I should know it was your dear self doing it, and then I should feel no pain, but think only of the time when I should have eyes like other people, and see. Oh, auntie, dear auntie, why can you not do it at once? I will be so good; I will not even say 'Oh!'"

But Victoria had to explain to her that she must wait a little longer, and that what she would require from her most was patience, for that her sight might not be regained all at once, but gradually; and then it was even possible there might be failure, so that it was necessary that one eye only should be operated on at a time; and that even if all went well, it would take many months of watchfulness and care to effect the cure she hoped for.

"Oh, darling auntie, what are a few months to years of darkness!"

"Darkness," the child repeated, as if to herself; "I wonder if people who can see know what it is to be always in the dark, or

to know, as I do, just enough of what light is, to make darkness so hateful. Oh, auntie, I cannot tell you how hateful darkness is to me ; sometimes it is as if my eyes must have something before them which shuts out this beautiful light, and I could tear them out I am so angry. Oh, dear auntie, give me light—light! I feel as if I shall die unless you can give me light. Sometimes when I am alone, I cannot breathe for want of light ; it is as if I were walled up in a hole : and were it not that I have you, and Chub, and Lady Runnymede, and dear little 'Somebody,' and all you have taught me to think of, and the great hope that is always before me, it would kill me ; and without eyes I would rather die than live. Oh, dear auntie, if I could see you but once, only once, I should die happy !"

And she threw her arms round Victoria's neck and covered her with kisses.

As time passed on, these outbursts became more frequent, but they were like storms which clear the atmosphere ; she was always calmer when they were over : and so

many means were taken to divert her attention from herself that she was prevented from sinking into the state of morbid melancholy to which she had at times exhibited a tendency.

To Lady Runnymede and Eva Madge was a great comfort; the most so, perhaps, to the first, for Eva had a gleam of brightness ever shining in upon her life in the love of that good, honest fellow Chub.

For some time past Geraldine had ceased to be idle. Acting upon Victoria's advice, she had devoted a certain portion of each day to study, and she was perfectly astonished at the progress she had made. She had learnt German, gained a fair knowledge of botany and geology, and could now sketch with accuracy and ease.

Besides all this, she taught Madge. Eva taught her too; but Madge declared that it was Geraldine who taught her best.

If the truth must be told—and why should we seek to conceal it?—a gleam of light like the first harbinger of dawn had broken through the gloom which had threatened to

enshroud the future, as well as the present, of Geraldine's life.

Yes, it must be told : that imp Love was at his tricks again.

No one is safe from his shafts. They pierce alike the heart that has been steeled against attack in the laboratory of age, or made callous to their smart through the deadness which proceeds from sorrow.

Victoria's influence was doing much, but behind it there was——

Was what ?

Simply what is behind half the motives by which mankind is actuated ; an impulse which impels, but hides itself.

Even to herself Geraldine would have blushed to have owned that her heart had again been touched. But so it was ; and how could it have been otherwise ?

Sir Francis had joined the Alpine Club. Was it likely that he would come to Switzerland, and not see the greatest friend he had upon earth—Victoria ?

And was it right that he should avoid Geraldine, when it happened, as it sometimes did happen, that she was staying with her

old friends? Would it not have been unmanly and unkind to have turned away from Lady Runnymede in her sorrow? No, he would not be so selfish; it might be painful at first, but he would meet her as an old friend—as if nothing had ever passed between them.

But how would she receive him? He had written to Victoria:

"I am again in Switzerland, and want much to see you, but find you are taking a holiday in the mountains. I hope Lady Runnymede is better, and that Miss Yorke is well. If I did not fear that my presence might be unwelcome, I should some fine morning, descend from out of the clouds upon you, and say all I want to say *vivâ voce*, instead of by letter. Give my love to my little friend Madge, and tell her that I have been thinking very much of her lately."

It was true—for Victoria had written to tell him that Madge was with Geraldine, and of course he did not know that he had thought of anyone but Madge.

Another of those secrets which we keep even from ourselves.

Victoria had written but two words in reply:

"Pray come."

And then it was that the imp Love had once more plied his shafts.

Not roughly—not rudely—not such shafts as he had shot before: but gently—so gently that at first the smart was hardly felt; and when it was, it seemed as if it came from some old wound. But shaft came after shaft, until Geraldine never looked up at a mountain without thinking of Sir Francis, and Sir Francis never looked down from one without thinking of Geraldine.

She felt so very sorry for him—and he felt so very sorry for her.

Nothing more. No! of course not.

All this time, Victoria working away at eyes —using her own, as if they had very little use beyond that which would make them useful to others: the bright streak across her future becoming brighter and brighter.

The goal she had set before her was at last reached: he was ready. But before Madge's eyes could be operated on there was much to be thought of.

She set to work to organise everything. She obtained the concurrence of Geraldine and Eva; for she set great store upon their help during the long, weary period which must elapse between the several operations and the completion of the cure.

"If all should go well, how long do you think it will be before the poor child's sight is restored?" asked Geraldine.

"From first to last, I should not like to say less than a year," said Victoria; "for but one eye can be operated on at a time, and a sufficient interval must be allowed between the operations."

"But will she be confined to her bed, or her room, all that time?"

"Oh dear, no! Only for a short time after each operation; but the light will have to be carefully regulated, and it will be necessary, in order to preserve her health, that her mind should be occupied and amused, and that everything should be done to keep her from undue excitement."

At last all was ready, and the day fixed for the operation.

Victoria was calm and confident; Madge impatient for the moment to arrive; Geraldine and Eva nervous and full of anxiety. They would have been more so had it not been for Sir Francis.

He could not be absent at a moment which was so full of interest to them all. It seemed only natural that he should come. Victoria was pleased at his having done so; but it was Geraldine who said:

"It is so kind of him; it is so like Sir Francis!"

* * * * * *

The operation was over.

Little Madge, with bandaged eyes, lay in a darkened room.

"Was I not good, dear auntie?" she asked, as Victoria bent down and kissed her tenderly.

"As good as gold, dear child," said Victoria; "but now you must be quite quiet."

All went well; there were no unfavourable symptoms: and the moment came when Victoria could venture upon ascertaining whether

she had been successful — whether Madge would see.

It was one of those decisive moments, the memory of which cling to us throughout our lives.

Much as she had hoped for success—and all the indications were on its side—the dread of failure lay heavily upon her; and Sir Francis and the two sisters, as they greeted her that morning, could not help observing her extreme pallor.

But though they were struck by it, and divined the cause, they thought it better not to allude to it.

So when Victoria went into Madge's room alone—for neither during the operation nor afterwards, when she visited the child professionally, had she allowed anyone but the trained nurse, who was attending her, to be present; the three continued to sit together in deep silence awaiting the verdict, which they knew would be as momentous in its results to her who gave it as upon the poor blind child herself.

Instinctively, Geraldine had risen and taken the seat vacated by Victoria; it was

near Sir Francis, and it was as if she had gained courage as she placed herself by his side.

He, too, must have gained something by her change of place, or why should he have looked towards her with an expression of such deep gratitude—such deep gratitude that his eyes were almost overflowing with it. What had she done?—surely it could not have been a mere change of position, over a distance at the very outside of three feet two inches, that should have made him feel so desperately grateful.

Eva had not observed it; she was looking into space or through space, and her thoughts were in the Indian Ocean, where she was holding converse with the gallant young surgeon of a ship under full sail, careering homewards:

She was telling him all about Madge, and how she had wished that Victoria had put off the operation till his return—which indeed she had, for Eva had an immense idea of the professional skill of Chub.

Not that she had the slightest concep-

tion of what it was he had learnt or knew; but she took it all on trust, and so was very happy, as indeed all people are who can only persuade themselves to trust in another, as she did.

She was still thinking of the ship, or rather of its surgeon—and being so employed the time had seemed very short to her, when the door opened and Victoria reappeared.

She was even more pallid than before. She staggered rather than walked to a chair, threw herself in it, and covering her face with her hands, burst into a flood of tears. She who had not wept for years!

Geraldine and Sir Francis, who had both risen at her entrance, looked from her, to each other. Could it be that she had been deceived — that the child was hopelessly blind? They did not know what to think.

But in the same instant Eva had flown to Victoria, had cast herself on her knees beside her, had thrown her arms lovingly round her, mingled her tears with hers, and said:

"Oh, Vic! you will kill me if you cry.

Tell me what it is—tell me how can we comfort you, my dear, my darling sister?"

Whether it was the loving words, or whether it was that Victoria had had time to conquer her emotion, she uncovered her face as Eva finished speaking, and, though the tears still ran down her cheeks, her voice became calm as she said:

"Thank God with me for having enabled me to help the dear child—she will see!"

Then before either Geraldine or Sir Francis had time to speak, Eva had risen. Could it be Eva, the quiet, timid, shrinking Eva, who now stood up before them?

"And she who has done this great thing is my sister—*your* sister, Geraldine—our father's child!" and when Victoria would have stopped her, she placed her hand upon her lips, and continued: "No, I will not be silent. I take shame unto myself for having known this so long and kept it to myself."

"Remember your promise," said Victoria, reproachfully.

"There are promises which should never be made and ought not to be kept," was the

answer. "I have never been an hour with Geraldine without being made to feel that I was deceiving her. And now the only thing I can do is to ask for forgiveness, and tell her all."—And in a flood of hurried words she poured forth all she knew.

Victoria sat silent with her face again concealed in her hands—she did not weep now, but her short quick breathing and the convulsive heaving of her bosom showed the intensity of her emotion. Geraldine and Sir Francis stood before her side by side. When Eva had commenced speaking, Sir Francis had made a movement towards the door; but Geraldine had motioned him to stay.

"Stop!" said Geraldine suddenly, almost authoritatively, to Eva; "why should you say more? I see it all. And now," she said, as she went up to Victoria and caressed her lovingly, "I have the key to much that has so often puzzled me. Oh, my dear sister, how much you must have suffered, how much you have borne, and oh, so bravely!"

"Thank you for that word," said Victoria, uncovering her face, "it has recalled me to

myself. Have I been brave, when I have been so weak as to shed tears, because my heart was full of joy, and have not dared to face that which has become a part and parcel of my life? and yet it was from no feeling of selfishness or of false pride, but because I would have spared much pain—for the sake of the dead, that I would have kept this secret. Yet perhaps it is better as it is. Dear Eva, forgive me; I ought not to have cast a load upon you which was too heavy for you to bear. The only favour, the only kindness I have to beg of you all now—and I know you love me too much not to grant it—is, that this subject may in the future, be alluded to as little as possible; and indeed why should it be spoken of to others? It would pain me to think it had become a subject for gossip, and I should wish the knowledge of it to be confined to ourselves, Chub, and his good father. I am sure you will agree with me, my dear sisters, as will, I am certain, Sir Francis."

Sir Francis had no time for reply, for Geraldine with blushing cheeks had gone

to him, and, placing her arm in his, had said :

"Ah, Victoria! this is indeed a day of marvels. The poor child sees. I have gained a sister, and——" her voice faltered, and she could only look appealingly to Sir Francis.

"And this very day," he said, "Geraldine has made me the happiest of men—she has consented to be my wife. Will you accept me as your brother?"

Victoria started from her seat.

"Is it really so, Geraldine? Oh, you do not know how happy you have made me. It has been my greatest wish, for I know better than anyone how well you are suited to each other."

"But you have not answered my question," said Sir Francis.

"What question?"

"Will you look upon me as a brother?"

"Indeed I will," said Victoria, "from this very moment; and to show you that I do so——"

She went up to him and kissed him on his forehead; and Sir Francis, as in duty bound, kissed her in return, and kissed Eva, and

kissed Geraldine; but to Geraldine's kiss he added some whispered words.

"Ah!" she said, "I am so happy."

Happy! and who was not happy? The passing cloud was gone. Victoria was once more herself; she was made happy through the happiness of others. Eva was happy because she had been released from what she had felt to be a kind of bondage; the confidence between her and Geraldine had been restored, and she no longer felt bound—oh, crime of crimes!—to keep anything secret from the beloved Chub. As for Geraldine and Sir Francis, the present seemed to atone for the past; for their state, happiness is too mild a word.

And the way in which their happiness had been brought about on this particular day was such a very simple one.

Sir Francis was one of those commendable people who always get up early.

Geraldine, perhaps because Sir Francis had said so much of the beauty of the early morning, had of late followed his example; and so they had met, and it is not difficult to imagine the inevitable result, knowing as

we do, that both their hearts were bleeding from old and new wounds.

"Now," said Victoria, "that we are all once more in our right senses, and I have put off the weak woman and become again the staid doctor, let us cease for a time to think of ourselves, or of each other," she said, playfully looking at Geraldine and Sir Francis, and think of the poor child—of dear Madge.

"Does she know that she will regain her sight?" asked Sir Francis.

"Yes. But I have concealed from her to what extent. She only knows at present that she can distinguish moving forms, for her room has still to be kept darkened. But I have now no doubt of the result, and there is no reason why the operation on the second eye should not be equally successful. I cannot imagine why I should have been so overcome. I feel quite ashamed of myself."

"Dear Vic," said Geraldine, "it has always been your strength, and not your weakness, which has astonished me."

"I will go to Madge," said Eva. "The

dear child has been too long alone, and will wonder what has become of us."

She went into the room where Madge was. A curtain was drawn across the window, but sufficient light came through it to permit of the outline of large objects being visible.

Madge was dressed, sitting in an easy-chair in which the nurse had just placed her. The bandage had been taken off her eyes.

As Eva entered the room and passed the window, the child cried out:

"What is that? Something has passed across the light. Is it you, nurse?"

'No, dear; it is me," said Eva. "I have come to sit with you."

"Oh dear little 'Somebody!'" said the child. "I am so glad. The first moving thing else I have seen was dear auntie. Now it is you. Come here! I want to tell you something. Closer, closer—it must be whispered in your ear."

"I want you to help me to thank God He has been so kind to me."

CHAPTER X.

GROUPED ON THE LAWN.

It was the afternoon of one of those beautiful summer days which are unfortunately so rare in England, and the lawn at Hawthornedene was shimmering in the bright sunlight; one of those days on which Nature seems to beckon to loungers within doors, and say, "Come!"

"Come! I have arrayed me in my best. I am in my most happy mood. I have perfumed the air with the scent of flowers, and made it melodious with the song of birds. I have spread a carpet of verdure beneath your feet, and enamelled it with living gems. All is so fair, that Heaven looks down and smiles. To-day I keep high festival. Come, add your joy to mine. Come!"

And, seemingly in answer to her appeal, a number of people had assembled on the lawn, and were sitting in a picturesque group, in the shade of the fragrant limes which formed one of its boundaries.

The group had been made all the more picturesque by the addition of three small children—for youth is to age what light is to shade, and in Nature, as in Art, there can be no beauty without contrast.

The three young children are new to us. The rest of the group is composed of old friends—friends who are five years older than when we saw them last, so that some of them are a little changed; but there is only one of them who is grown out of our knowledge. It is a fair bright girl, who wears spectacles; her face beams with pleasure, and her silvery laugh rings out above the buzz of conversation; for the party is by no means a silent one.

She is seated on the ground, and is busily employed endeavouring to make the eldest of the children, a sturdy, rosy little rogue of some four years old, pronounce the name of his little sister, who, all unconscious of the

difficulty she is the cause of, is rolling about on a shawl which has been spread for her special benefit. The third of the children is a baby, stretching out its little pink toes, and blinking in the sunlight, from the depths of a perambulator.

"Come, Frank, don't be naughty; you know you can say it very well. Come now, say 'Victoria.'"

"Ick—lor—lia."

"No, no, that will not do; you can say it much better than that. Try again: 'Vic——'"

"Orly—lorly—lia."

"Oh, you naugh——"

The end of the word was smothered ere it could be spoken; for Frank had thrown his arms round the speaker's neck, and was sealing her mouth with his soft red pouting lips, so that it was with difficulty she could release herself and say:

"Oh, you tiresome boy! you really must be whipped. You have nearly choked me."

The word "whipped" seemed to jar on

Frank's feelings, and cause a revulsion in his sentiments towards the speaker.

"You're a nasthy cross thing—I don't love you at all. I 'ill beat you."

"Oh, Margaret, Margaret! I fear it is you who spoil Frank, after all; and when he is utterly intractable everyone will say that he is just like his father. I really must look after my character. Come here, sir!" said a gentleman, stepping forward.

But Frank only drew all the closer to Madge, and said:

"Fank 'ill be good—he 'ill stay with dear Maret."

And she whom he calls Maret seems to have given up all ideas of whipping, for she opens her arms, and the child takes shelter within them.

"So it was only a lover's quarrel, after all," said the gentleman. And there was a general laugh.

But Margaret and Frank seemed to care very little about it; so busy were they whispering loving words to each other. They were evidently making it up.

It was difficult to recognise in that fair,

bright, happy-looking girl, who was called Margaret, the poor, pale, sorrow-stricken, blind Madge, as we first knew her.

It is the same, yet not the same. Four years of sight—the continued influence of one for whom her affection has no bounds—the gradual withdrawal of her thoughts from the sad memories of the past—the softening effects of the society of loving friends—have combined to produce a change in her which is nothing short of transformation. And she who has been the prime mover in this great work is—Victoria.

Victoria, who at this moment stands the centre of a group, of whom there is scarcely one to whose happiness she has not largely contributed.

Victoria, the first bloom of youth past; five years older it is true, but those five years have not destroyed her beauty—they have but matured it.

And so it is with that graceful and elegant woman who five years ago was Lady Runnymede, but now, as Lady Hawthorne, leans upon her husband's arm, happy in the possession of his heart, and in being

the mother of his children. Her eyes suffuse with tears as she looks from Madge, or Margaret as we must now call her, holding her child in her arms, to Victoria—to her sister Victoria—to the one being to whom she owes all that has made life so bright to her.

Sir Francis must have divined what was in her thoughts, for he took her hand, and passing her arm through his, pressed it tenderly, whilst he, too, looked towards Victoria.

And the old doctor, for he is there, is cheered in his solitude—for shortly after his children's marriage his wife had died—by his new child, his Eva. Her devotion to the old man is touching to behold; perhaps it is because, as yet, she has remained childless, and so has had nothing to divert her attention from him.

"She takes too much care of me," the doctor would say. "She has made me like a spoiled child. I shall begin to cry soon after something I cannot get. It seems to be my fate; my poor dear wife was never tired of spoiling me."

It is true he had never been out of that kind-hearted, simple-minded woman's thoughts. With her last breath she had commended him to Eva's care:

"Be sure, my dear, that you make his coffee yourself, and take care that it is hot."

And then she died.

Chub, metamorphosed into Dr. Charles Pringle—for no one presumes to call him "Chub" now—is in the full-swing of country practice. He is as much idolised by his wife as ever, and the only complaint she is ever heard to utter, is, that he is so much away from home.

"It is very tiresome that people cannot do without him; but then, he is so clever."

This was a matter upon which Dr. Charles Pringle had himself always entertained very grave doubts; but when a man's wife says that her husband is clever, surely there must be something in it. It gave him confidence, and made him work with a will, for he felt he had a character to keep up.

In point of fact, he was quite clever enough for the ordinary work of this world, and that

is more than half of us can pretend to. He was too thorough in his honesty for self-assertion, and it was this straightforwardness of character which had first attracted Eva; and now, the more she knew him, and the longer she loved him, the more honest she found him.

He did not love her—he simply worshipped her. Now, more than ever, for she had confided to him what was supposed to be a great secret, so that just now his cup of happiness was very full indeed.

Dr. Pringle did not do much work now, though he thought he did; but he continued to make a round of gossiping visits to his old friends, and to those who had for many years constituted themselves his patients, though he had never been able to make out their ailments, and understand why they should insist upon his paying them a daily visit.

They said it was such a comfort to them; though, perhaps, he did little more than say:

"Not better, my dear madam? Well, well! be thankful you are no worse. For

my part, I see no reason—if you go on as you are doing now—why you should not outlive Methuselah."

He, too, is very proud of Chub.

There is one visit which he pays daily—the one which gives him the greatest pleasure—the one to Sis. "Sis" to him alone, for to the rest of the world, outside her own family, she is spoken of—and that in subdued tones—as "the rector's wife," and in her own family as "Mrs. Aloysius," or less frequently as "Elizabeth."

Sis has changed her name, she has cast, as it were, her outer skin, but she has not changed her nature. Look at her now, as she forms one of the group on the lawn, only separated by the perambulator and baby from the Rev. Aloysius; the Rev. Aloysius whom she has made her disciple and slave, and rendered obedient in all things; that model man, made up of negations and prejudices, who seeks to do good in his generation by opposing the changes which belong to time. Opposing, did we say? it is a wrong word—he opposes nothing—he advances no opinions—he but smiles in pity

on those he differs from, and then moves on his own way, rejoicing.

Can that imposing person really be dear little Sis? And in that almost conventual dress? Why, she is almost as much like a nun as her husband is like a priest!

And the baby, too, in that quaint, old-fashioned cap and coat! for the baby in the perambulator is her baby—the never-to-be-sufficiently-talked-about Ursula.

Ah, now there can be no mistake; it is indeed Sis, for she is posing—she is captivating the public—for unless Sis is captivating, she is nothing—and exhibiting her husband and child. All this not in her old way, but in a new way, befitting the responsibilities of her position, for, as she often says:

"I have always to remember that I am a priest's wife."

At the present moment, she and her husband and the baby form a picture—a mediæval picture! For everything about them is mediæval; she knows that everybody is looking at them and thinking so; and she is satisfied.

It is probably that old serpent Vanity, who is at the bottom of it all; but for his wiles the rector and his wife would be very ordinary humdrum people.

But humdrum, Sis never can or will be. "Heaven forefend it!"

The doctor, who is as fond of her as ever, finds amusement in her vagaries. He declares he cannot find a single chair in the rectory fit to sit upon, and that their straight backs hurt his spine; and then he laughs, and says that she and her husband are suffering from a terrible disease, "the mediævals," and that he fears they cannot be cured.

He is never so happy as when he makes his little grandchild laugh and crow, to the great scandal of all the household; for it would seem that there is a certain dignity belonging to the name of Ursula, which has to be kept up.

With Sir Francis and Lady Hawthorne the rector and his wife are on the best of terms, for Sir Francis has each year become more and more convinced that we cannot all think alike; and Geraldine's trials have taught her to be indulgent to the foibles of others, and

she has long ceased to say bitter, biting things. Her time and thoughts are now taken up with her children and her husband. Although she does not always agree with his ideas, she thoroughly sympathises with the objects he has in view, and she has learnt to put forward her views in a way which has made her a valuable counsellor. She is as graceful, and beautiful, and dignified as ever; but her dignity is that of a refined English matron who only does not despise, because she has ceased to regard, the frivolities of fashion. Her name never now appears in the Court calendar, but it is registered in many, very many, grateful hearts; for devoted as she is to her husband and her home, she has kind words, and kind thoughts, and kind acts for all who need them.

She sometimes laughs at her husband, and tells him, "Do you know why you love me? It is because I have tried to make myself like Victoria."

"You have succeeded in one thing," he says in reply.

"What is it?"

"In making me very, very happy;" and

then he is so demonstrative, that did we not know they had been married some years, we might fancy we were in presence of a newly-married couple, whose honeymoon had not yet waned.

Really, Sir Francis, we did not expect this of you. We had no idea you would continue to be so effusive. What! a member of Parliament, whose words have such weight; a chairman of quarter sessions, and the author of that valuable work, "The best Government — Self-government" — to kiss your wife as if you were still a boy, and she sweet sixteen!

Well, well, the temptation was very great, and we will forgive you. But you positively must not do it again. This book has a reputation which must not be trifled with.

It is not intended to be "realistic" in the modern sense of the word; if it were, we should request our reader to put it in the fire at once.

But to return to our group on the lawn.

"Only fancy, Eva," said Sir Francis, "when I was passing through the Park the day before yesterday, I came upon those

inseparables, Pierrepoint Phipps and Fitzjones."

"I suppose looking the same as ever," said Eva, indifferently.

"Not quite; Fitzjones has taken to dying his hair, and affects a frightful ginger colour; and poor P. P. walks with a stick, and tells me he has become a martyr to the gout."

"Poor creature!" said Geraldine.

"What a sad end," said the doctor, "for the Adonis of the Park to live to be pitied!"

"I don't know any class of men who seem to me more worthy of compassion," said Victoria, "than these idle men about town. I never look at them without being struck with the utter sadness of their faces."

"Come, come," said Chub, "you must remember, Victoria, every man can't become a doctor."

"Happily," said the rector's wife. One of her whims was to pretend that she hated doctors, and she took a special pleasure in expressing this dislike before Victoria.

Victoria only smiled; a bright smile,

which has not the slightest tinge of sadness. She did not take the trouble to reply, but threw herself down upon the shawl and began to romp with her little namesake.

Whilst she is doing so, and the Reverend Aloysius, who is not good at conversation, is from time to time droning out bits from a controversial magazine which he is skimming over, let us take the opportunity of explaining how it is she is now in England, and what she is doing, and, indeed, all about her; but we must lose no time for Mr. Mortimer has already put in an appearance upon the lawn, and in a short time he will be down upon us with the tea; and the nurses will come for the children; and we shall have to hand round the cream, and the cake, and the bread and butter; and shall not have another quiet moment.

The restoration of Madge's sight, followed by the marriages of Geraldine and Eva, and their settlement in the same neighbourhood, had decided Victoria upon returning to England. Indeed, had she wished to have remained abroad she would have found it difficult to have resisted her sister's urgent entreaties

that she would come and live near them. Formerly, the many painful memories connected with her old home might have made it difficult for her to have done so; but now her love for her sisters, for their husbands, for Dr. Pringle, and it must be confessed, in a somewhat smaller degree, for Sis, outweighed every other consideration.

Besides, she felt it would be selfish to exclude Madge, whom she looked upon as her child, and who in her hours of leisure was her inseparable companion, from the advantages of being within reach of those whose affection for her was only second to her own.

But she could not be idle. Idleness had become hateful to her. She must have work. She could only accede to their wishes if this could be found.

"Of course country practice is out of the question," she had said. "I know how ridiculous it would seem if Dr. Charles Pringle and Dr. Victoria Marsh were to be seen driving about the country together as partners; and to set up in opposition to dear old Chub would be more than absurd. Besides, my *forte*, if I have any, is in spe-

cialities. I should make a very indifferent general practitioner."

So, after many sittings in conclave with the Drs. Pringle, father and son, and Sir Francis, it had been decided that she should settle in the neighbouring town, which was within an easy drive of them all, where there was an eye infirmary and a hospital for children; and that she should confine her practice as much as possible to diseases of the eye, and only extend it, in cases where she might be required to act in consultation.

She had been able to get one of those comfortable, country-town, double-faced houses; the one face red, ugly, and professional, towards the street; the other, pretty and coquettish, looking out upon a large and shady lawn; and in a short time had made herself thoroughly at home.

The prejudice against her had very quickly worn off, for it was soon discovered by those who were interested in the local charities, that she was prepared to give a degree of time and attention to them which was beyond the power of the ordinary medical staff; and her skill had soon become

so apparent, that even those who had been most prepared to oppose her, were obliged to give way before the irresistible evidence of facts.

In two years, her reputation had become thoroughly established; and even the secretary of the hospital for children, who had always been known for his untiring denunciation of women doctors, had become so far converted, that, at the last annual dinner, when some one had alluded to Dr. Victoria in eulogistic terms, he had remained silent.

Indeed through her influence the eye infirmary had, as it were, been awakened into new life; former patients, who had been discharged from it as incurable, had returned to it to receive their sight; and in the children's hospital the change was equally remarkable, for Dr. Victoria Marsh not only knew how to treat the little sufferers, but she loved them.

So her fame had spread throughout the county, until in all doubtful or difficult cases, in which a second opinion might seem necessary, the first idea which suggested itself, was to call in Dr. Victoria.

There had been great excitement in the

town, when it became known that the new tenant of West Street House was a lady doctor, and no little disappointment, when it was discovered that she did not look different from other people.

The young mercer's-assistant, on the opposite side of the street, could not help expressing his incredulity to the young lady in the shop who shared his duties.

"Don't tell me, Eliza Ann, that she's the doctor. If that's the doctor I'll eat her! Wait a little; you'll see the doctor's a guy, and wears spectacles. That must be her sister, and the young one's her niece."

Some of the families living in the town had known Victoria as a girl, and many of them had heard all about her; but there were few of them who were prepared to find her so utterly unlike what they had imagined her to be.

The Miss Molseleys, the maiden daughters of a former rector, made a house-to-house visitation shortly after her arrival, in order to retail their experiences, and gain further information about her.

"Will you believe it, my dear, when we

called yesterday we found her sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, embroidering a table-cover. Was she not, Jane?"

"Yes, Matilda; and the table was covered with knickknacks."

"And she sings duets with her niece, for she told us so. The first thing Jane said when we came out was, 'I don't believe in her.'"

"No, Matilda; no, that was you. I only said I had not much opinion of her as a doctor; she had all the airs and graces of a young lady, and was too well dressed."

"And in such a dress as that, to poke about amongst broken bones and skulls, it is quite dreadful to think of. I would not be a doctor for the world."

There is an old lady present who is deaf, and only hears the few stray words which fall into her ear-trumpet; skulls and bones would seem to have done so, for she cannot conceal her horror, and declares that such things should not be allowed. It was not so in her time. Skulls and bones indeed! It is all very well for men, but——

Do what they will, the Miss Molseleys

cannot stop her. She talks so loud no one else can be heard. So they take their leave, and with the voice of the deaf old lady still ringing in their ears, they continue their peregrinations.

Wherever they go, first one and then the other repeats the same thing: "I would not be a doctor for the world." And having said so, proceed, in a covert insinuating sort of way, to draw a comparison between themselves and Victoria, greatly to their own advantage.

"They, are not peculiar." "They, do not pretend to know more than other people." "They, keep within their proper sphere."

The moral, being, that it would be much better for Victoria, if she were to follow their example, and pass their time as they do, in daily house-to-house visitations.

Meantime the deaf old lady is busy, on her beat, informing her friends "that Victoria sits in a room full of skulls and bones," and gradually works herself up into such a state of indignation, that it becomes a question with her, whether she ought not to inform the police.

But all this soon wears off. The nine days' wonder dies a natural death, and joins the shades of other departed nine days' wonders. The Miss Molseleys are sometimes induced to think, whether it might not have been better for them if they too had been doctors; and even the deaf old lady has given up her craze about skulls and bones, and speaks of Victoria as "that dear good creature."

Dr. Victoria! That which had seemed so ridiculous but a short time since, was now quite natural. Mothers who had always declared they had no faith in women, and would rather call in a cow-doctor, gratefully accepted her aid; and in many cases felt thankful that it was to a woman, and not to a man, they had to enter upon the details of their own or their children's ailments.

Never perhaps were two people so thoroughly happy as Victoria and Madge.

Victoria, happy in her work, in her leisure, in the companionship of Madge, parcelling out her time so that not a moment of it is lost, preparing herself for the labours of the day whilst others are yet asleep, growing

richer without wishing to do so, lying down at night with a grateful heart and a clear conscience, thinking of those she loves, as she falls asleep, and of Madge.

And Madge?

Madge is as bright as a bird and as busy as a bee. She, too, is up betimes, for she has to study, and to practise, for music has become her passion, and in the evening nothing Victoria likes so much as to hear her sing; and the garden is under her care, and she has to arrange the flowers—"auntie is so fond of flowers;" and she has the housekeeping to attend to, and she has the infirmary to visit, and her blind friends at the institution, so that she has not an idle moment; and were it not that she carols as she goes about the house, and that her face is beaming with happiness, she might appear an object for pity, she has so much to do.

Victoria is her idol—dear auntie, as she calls her; and when she lies down at night, it is with a thanksgiving and a prayer for dear auntie upon her lips, that her once sightless eyes are closed in sleep.

But sometimes she wakes up sorrowful

and sad — it is when she has dreamt of "Pops."

And Dr. Victoria keeps her carriage— a pony-carriage with a pair of bay ponies, and Madge is not a little proud of being allowed to drive them; and it is in this carriage that they have driven over to Hawthornedene.

But the tea has come, the children have been kissed with more or less fervour all round and taken away; let us hand the cream and the cake, and the bread-and-butter, and take our leave.

Let us say good-bye to them, as they form a happy group in the shade of the lime-trees, on that glorious summer afternoon, whilst they are still full of happiness in themselves and in each other; for who knows what a morrow may bring forth, or what clouds may be gathering on the horizon? and even now we have to remember that fond and foolish mother, and her selfish miserable son, wasting their lives in what is worse than folly, on the distant Riviera.

"Good-bye, my friends, good-bye! Good-bye, Victoria!"

Who is it who has caught up the last word?

It is Mr. Mortimer, who, from a little distance, had been surveying the scene with a thoughtful air.

"Victoria?" he said, in a voice that was just audible. "Victoria? Yes! if ever there were two angels upon earth"—it would be impossible to do justice to his aspirates—"it is my Mary and Dr. Victoria."

From this it will be seen that Mr. Mortimer was yet unmarried, and that Mary had preferred to remain—an angel.

POSTSCRIPT.

THERE is one individual amongst our characters whose present position in society entitles him to some further notice.

Major—we beg his pardon—now, by her Majesty's favour and his honorary rank in the reserve forces, *Colonel* Thomas Trenton, has been borne onward, not by one, but by many, waves of prosperity; and in proportion as Fortune had smiled on him, so had Society opened her arms wider and wider to receive him.

The large amount of money he had gained from Marmaduke Yorke had never been a matter of notoriety; it was only known that he had been successful on the Turf. But since then his name had been associated with other successes; and when it was whis-

pered that the ruin of the Earl of Southdown was chiefly to be attributed to the gallant officer's combinations, and that almost every penny belonging to that unfortunate nobleman had been transferred to his pocket, the enthusiasm of his many admirers, and of those who are always ready to worship success, had no bounds.

Had the gallant colonel been a "professional beauty," he could not have been more sought after: he obtained at once the *entrée* to what he speaks of as the "highest" circles, and it is a pleasure to see him driving in the Park with that frank, self-satisfied, soldier-like air which seems so natural to him, and to observe the affable, condescending way with which he returns the salutes of young griffins from the camp, who are under the impression that they are taking off their hats to some distinguished general.

The Bowood races are as popular and select as ever. The Lawn on the last Cup day was however, on account of the wet weather, less brilliant than usual. And Mrs. Kurr Crawley was not there; for she has had to undergo the mortification of being eclipsed by a new

beauty, who is said by connoisseurs, to possess superior points.

The number of the guests from the great house was somewhat affected by the rain; but nevertheless, in the reserved portion of the grand stand, that stout old soldier Von Schwerin was to be seen, looking out upon the course, and the world at large, with the serene satisfaction of a man whose lines have been cast in pleasant places.

Mr. and Mrs. Fulford have been placed in charge of the "Institute and Coffee Rooms" lately built by Sir Francis.

At first Mrs. Fulford had been greatly scandalised by the practices and doctrines of the Rev. Aloysius; but on that gentleman having expressed a wish to avail himself of Mr. Fulford's valuable services as sexton and bellringer, she began to understand him better, and it need not be a matter for surprise that after she had received a certain amount of attention from the rector's wife, she had been enabled to add to her former experiences, that one which proceeds from being privileged to wear a lozenge-shaped medallion, and to attach to her signature

those mysterious letters, which had led, some years before, to those facetious remarks from Chub, which had been characterised by his sister as, *profane.*

Under the pressure of business, Souseman and Soppit have been obliged to increase their capital, and "the Trade" is about to obtain a Royal Commission to inquire into the legality of coffee-houses.

They have taken counsel's opinion, and it seems tolerably certain, that the rights of property will be upheld, and the coffee-houses suppressed.

If it were not so, it is unlikely we should see so many new houses decorated in the latest style of modern art, upon which painters are busily employed in painting, in letters six times the ordinary size, the time-honoured names of:

SOUSEMAN AND SOPPIT.

THE END.

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